

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1891.

THE FATE OF THE HARA DIAMOND.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOST AS SOON AS FOUND.

JANET'S life at this time was a very quiet one ; but the long years she had spent in France had been so tame and colourless, so wanting in home pleasures and endearments, that, by contrast, her days at Deepley Walls were full of variety and of that sweet charm which springs from a knowledge that you are at once appreciated and loved.

Janet's love for Captain George was as yet a timid, callow fledgeling that could do nothing but flutter in the nest where it was born. Very pretty to look at, but not to be looked at too often, for fear lest its hiding-place should be found out and some rude hand should take it unawares. Her love for Sister Agnes was of a different texture, and made up the real quiet happiness of her life. She felt like a plant that has been lifted out of the cold corner in which it has found the elements of a stunted growth and set to bask in a flood of gracious sunshine. In such cases the result is not difficult to foretell. The plant grows more and more beautiful under the sweet influence that has been brought to bear upon it, and repays the sunshine with its most fragrant blossoms. In such-like was Janet's young life nourished and enriched by the love that existed between her and Sister Agnes. Her inner life developed itself unconsciously ; her heart grew in wisdom, and all the finer qualities of her nature began to unfold themselves one by one as delicate leaves unfold themselves in the sun.

Janet was kept very closely to her duties by Lady Chillington. Still, each day brought its little interregnums—odd hours, or even half-hours, when she was not wanted by her task-mistress—when her ladyship was sleeping, or lunching, or discussing private matters with Mr. Madgin, or what not. By far the greater part of these stolen moments were spent with Sister Agnes. More would have been so

spent had not the invalid given strict injunctions that a certain portion of each day should be set apart by Janet for out-door exercise. Sister Agnes was far too weak to accompany her. As the summer days went on she gathered not strength but weakness, and more and more clearly she began to discern the end that was coming so surely upon her. But as yet this was a solemn secret known only to herself and to her doctor. By no one else within Deepley Walls was it even suspected. Outwardly there was no change in her from day to day, or one so slight that those who were in the habit of seeing her every few hours never perceived it.

Her window had a pleasant outlook across the park. Her couch was wheeled close up to it, and there she lay from early in the forenoon till late in the afternoon, a pale, spiritual-eyed lady, slowly dying, although neither by word nor look was there any betrayal of that fact to those about her. Janet, we may be sure, had no suspicion of it. Never a morning came but her first inquiry was as to whether Sister Agnes felt any better.

"A little better this morning, I think, dear," Sister Agnes would smilingly say. "Or if not stronger, at least no weaker than I was yesterday." And for the time being she would feel that her statement was true. Later on in the day some small portion of vitality would seem to fade out of her which the freshness and strength of the following morning could not wholly replace. But Janet hoped with the hopefulness of youth that when the hot, languorous days of summer should give place to the chastened heats of autumn, health and strength would come back to Sister Agnes; hoped it devoutly, although she knew that should such be the case, she herself would no longer be needed by Lady Chillington, but that she should have to go out into the world and fight for her daily bread with such small skill as there might be in her. Meanwhile she waited on Sister Agnes, and ministered to her simple needs as much as lay in her power to do so. To gather a fresh bouquet every morning for the room where she loved so dearly was one of Janet's pleasantest occupations. Then there was always some new and interesting book to read aloud, with frequent interludes of music and conversation. Now and then an odd hour or two would be devoted to the science of the needle. Happy days! days such as Janet, if she were to live to be a hundred years old, could never forget.

Now that she had become more accustomed to Lady Chillington and her peculiar ways, the duties of her position ceased to press so heavily upon Janet. She found, to her surprise, that Lady Chillington's often positively cruel speeches no longer wounded her feelings so deeply as they did at first. The dislike and fear with which she had formerly regarded the strange old woman began to give place to a gentler feeling—to one of profound pity, and in this very pity she found an armour of proof against all the slights and contumely with which she was treated. One thing must be said in

favour of Lady Chillington. However capricious she might be in her own treatment of Janet, the servants were given to understand that in all things Miss Hope was to be regarded as a young gentlewoman, and not as one of themselves. Sometimes her ladyship would be overcome by a fit of graciousness, which, however, never lasted more than a day or two at a time; but while it did last Janet felt that her life was a very pleasant one. Such occasions were exceptional. Lady Chillington's normal mood was one of mingled harshness and suspicion, just rubbed over with a sort of cynical *laissez faire* that to a girl of Janet's disposition was peculiarly distasteful. Janet never answered her taunts and bitter speeches, but now and then a flash of scorn from her beautiful eyes, or a sudden rush of colour to her cheek, showed that the barbed words had struck home. Janet's icy meekness had often the effect of irritating her ladyship far more than any angry retort would have done. At the latter she would merely have laughed, but Janet's demeanour seemed suggestive of a fine though hidden contempt, and betrayed an indifference to her taunts that robbed her of half her pleasure in the utterance of them. As a consequence, there being no real faults to lay hold of, she sometimes accused Janet of those faults from which she was most free.

"Who and what are you, Miss Hope," she one day asked, in her scornful way, "that you should give yourself the airs of a grande dame when in my presence? Judging from your demeanour, you and not I might be the mistress of Deepley Walls. Pride ill becomes a dependent like you—a mere nobody—a person who has eaten the bread of charity from the day of her birth. If you had even the excuse of good looks! But that is quite out of the question. If you are in any way remarkable, it is for an incurable gaucherie, and for a stolidity of intellect that would not discredit a ploughboy."

It was only the teaching and example of Sister Agnes that kept Janet on such occasions from breaking into open rebellion, and bidding farewell for ever to Deepley Walls. But full gentle counsels of the sick woman prevailed, and by degrees these bitter speeches lost much of their sting.

Sometimes, when her mood was more than ordinarily spiteful, her ladyship would touch Janet's feelings in a different way. It was part of Janet's duties to assist Lady Chillington with the use of her arm as the latter walked from room to room, or on the terrace outside. As the two were walking staidly along, the old lady would sometimes pinch Janet's arm viciously between her thumb and finger. The first time this happened, Janet started and gave utterance to a little shriek.

"What is the matter, child?" said her ladyship, stopping suddenly in her walk. "Have you seen a mouse, or what has frightened you? Pray try to keep your nerves under better control."

After that first time, Janet bore the infliction in stoical silence, but

her arm was seldom without two or three blue and black finger marks as evidences of the petty torture she had undergone. To Sister Agnes she made no mention of this fresh mode of annoyance. The knowledge of it would only have jarred the sick woman's feelings still more, and would not have spared Janet the infliction.

Once every forenoon, between the hours of ten and twelve, Lady Chillington marched in her slow and stately fashion, and leaning on Janet's arm, from her own rooms on one side of the house to those of Sister Agnes on the opposite side, there to make formal inquiry as to the state of the latter's health. She never stayed longer than three or four minutes at each visit, and she never sat down. She seemed to regard these daily visits as a matter of duty, and as such she conscientiously included them in each day's programme of things to be done; but she spent no more time over them than was absolutely necessary. Sometimes Janet, on returning alone to the sick woman's room, soon after one of these visits, would find Sister Agnes in tears. Those were the only occasions on which her habitual serenity seemed to be seriously disturbed. But at sight of Janet's loving face her tears soon ceased to flow.

About this time Father Spiridion began to be seen more frequently at Deepley Walls. His visits were to Sister Agnes. Janet had contracted quite a liking for the kindly old man. He was a strange mixture of shrewdness and benignity, of prejudice and out-of-the-way knowledge. He never met Janet without a smile and a few words of pleasant greeting. She was too old now to have sweetmeats given her, so he gave her his blessing instead. Now, as of old, one of her greatest treats was to hear him play the grand old organ in the gallery.

Slowly and almost imperceptibly Sister Agnes faded from day to day, and those most about her suspected nothing. But at daybreak one morning there was a ringing of bells, and Dr. Graile was sent for in hot haste, and by-and-by it was reported through the house that Sister Agnes had become suddenly worse, and that her life was in danger. Janet was like one distracted. She was forbidden the room, and three whole days and nights passed away before she saw again the face of her so dearly loved. She besieged the doctor and the nurse with questions, but from neither of those functionaries could anything beyond a grave shake of the head be elicited. How she got through her routine of duties with Lady Chillington she could never afterwards remember. Happily during those few days her ladyship was less exacting than common—more silent and subdued, and given to long fits of absorbing self-communion.

On the fourth morning a message came to Janet that she was wanted in Sister Agnes's room. She went tremblingly. As she put her hand on the door it was opened from the inside, and Lady Chillington came out. Janet had never seen such an expression on her face before. It was set and colourless, and full of a deep, frowning

trouble. The trouble sprang from her heart; the frown was a visible sign of her intense will—of her unsparing determination to trample that trouble under foot and put it away from her for ever. Her eyes were fixed straight before her, but seemed to see nothing. Her tall, thin figure looked as upright and rigid as if cast in bronze. She swept slowly past Janet without appearing to have seen her.

Janet passed forward into the little sitting-room. She saw with an aching heart that this morning the sofa was without its occupant. After a word of warning from the nurse, she was allowed to enter the bedroom; then the door was closed behind her, and she and Sister Agnes were left alone.

Janet could not repress the low cry that sprang to her lips at the first glimpse of the changed face before her. On it there now rested the unmistakable seal of death. Janet flung herself on her knees by the side of the bed in an agony of grief, and pressed to her lips the worn white hand that was extended to greet her.

"My poor darling — my poor Janet!" was all that Sister Agnes could murmur. There were no tears in her eyes, but on her lips a smile of heavenly contentment.

Mindful of the caution that had been given her, Janet, after a few minutes, contrived to subdue in some measure the outward signs of the grief that was rending her heart.

"Come nearer," whispered Sister Agnes; "let me clasp you in my arms; let me feel for a little while that you are all my own. I have something to tell you, and not much time to tell it in. Kiss me, darling, and then listen to what I have to say without interrupting me."

When Janet had nestled to the side of the sick woman, and they had kissed each other fondly, Sister Agnes spoke again. Her words were low but clear; every syllable fell distinctly on her listener's ears. Occasionally she had to pause for breath, but Janet never spoke a word until she had done.

"It is a strange confession, dear Janet, that I am about to make," she began. "What I have now to tell you I bound myself by a solemn oath many years ago never to reveal until my dying day. That day has come at last. A few short hours will now end all. I have taken counsel with Father Spiridion, from whom I have no secrets. He has given me leave to speak. To-day is my last day on earth, and my oath is no longer binding. I could not have died happy had I carried my secret with me to the grave. But before I go any further, you must give me your sacred word never to reveal to Lady Chillington, nor indeed to anyone else, what I am about to tell you, without having first obtained the sanction of Father Spiridion and Major Strickland to your taking such a step. Later on you will understand fully my reasons for asking for such a promise."

Sister Agnes paused as if waiting for a reply. But Janet could not speak. A long, lingering pressure of the arms was her only answer. But it was an answer that satisfied the dying woman. She pressed

her lips fondly to the tear-stained face that was nestling on her shoulder, and then went on with her narration.

"Dearest, the time has now come for me to lift from off your life the weight of that mystery which has lain upon it ever since you were little more than a lisping child—since you first began to feel, think and understand, and to wonder why you were unlike other children in having no mother nor home of your own. The secret of your birth shall be to you a secret no longer. All these years, darling, you have not been without a mother's love, though you yourself might know it not. Janet, my darling! my daughter! it is your mother whose arms are round you now. Hush, sweet one! do not speak. My little strength will hardly serve to carry me to the end. Yes, dear one, I am your mother, and Lady Chillington is your grandmother; I am her ladyship's youngest and only living child. Why all these things have been kept from you for so long a time, why you have lived unacknowledged under the roof that should have held you as its greatest treasure, will be duly revealed to you after my death. Attached to this silver chain is a tiny key that will open a box which will be given to you by Father Spiridion. Inside that box you will find a paper written by me, which will tell you everything relating to your birth and history that it is needful for you to know. The good father and Major Strickland will be your counsellors; put yourself and your cause implicitly into their hands, and leave the rest to a Higher Power. Sweet one, I have now told you all that it is needful for you to know while I am still with you—all that my strength will allow me to say. We can be together but a brief while longer; let us during that time forget everything save that we are mother and child."

"Oh, mother, mother!" sobbed Janet, "are we brought together after all these years only to part again in so short a time?"

"Even so, dearest. And why should we grieve that such is the case? Our parting is only for a time. No conviction was ever more deeply impressed upon me than that is. As I stand now, earthly troubles and sorrows have no power to touch me. Even the knowledge that I am about to separate from my Janet cannot quench the solemn joy that fills my soul. I am so close to eternity that a few years seem to me but as one day. And when that brief, troubled day shall be at an end, I pray that my daughter and I may meet again in that heavenly rest into which all those shall enter who have guided their footsteps aright."

But Janet could not be consoled.

Later on in the day Sister Agnes sent for her again, and mother and daughter spent more than an hour together in sacred communion. In the dusk of evening Lady Chillington went again to her sick daughter's room. What passed at that last interview was known to themselves alone. Lady Chillington never again saw her daughter alive. Then Father Spiridion administered the last offices of his

Church to the dying woman. About nine o'clock the doctor drove up in his gig. But the time when he could be of service was gone by. At last mother and daughter were left alone together, and alone they remained all through the dark hours. At daybreak, Father Spiridion glided into the room. The fast-sinking woman opened her eyes and smiled.

"Play the 'Jubilate' for me," she whispered, "and open wide the casement."

The deep voice of the organ, exultant, yearning, solemn, thrilled through the room; and on its wings, through the faint grey of the autumn morning, the soul of Sister Agnes was borne away.

"Forget not that we shall meet again," were her last words.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CONFESSION.

MISS HOPE, Father Spiridion and Major Strickland were seated together in the little parlour of the latter on a certain morning a few weeks after the death of Sister Agnes. The Major had been over to Deepley Walls to beg a holiday for Janet, and had brought her back with him. This was the day appointed for the opening of the box that had been left in the Father's charge.

Janet in her black dress looked pale and worn, but very lovely. She had been obliged in some measure to conceal the outward tokens of her grief for fear of exciting the suspicions of Lady Chillington, and the effort had lent a touch of sternness to her face such as it had never worn before. The wound in her heart was as deep as it had ever been, but she had learned already to control her emotions, and her demeanour this morning was marked by a gravity and self-restraint that made her seem older than her years.

When they were all seated at table, Father Spiridion produced the box, a very small affair, made of cedar and hooped with silver. Janet handed him the key and he proceeded to open it.

"Before making an examination of the contents," he said, turning to Janet, "it is requisite that I should enlighten you on one or two points. At the request of Sister Agnes, I have informed our friend, Major Strickland, of the relationship that existed between you and her; I have told him also that you are the grand-daughter of Lady Chillington—two facts with which he was previously unacquainted, and which are a source of great surprise to him. I have further informed him as to the particular request of Sister Agnes that he should act with me in this case as trustee or executor for the furtherance of your interests in whatsoever direction those interests may seem to lie. Of the contents of this box I have only a general knowledge. I believe the chief article in it will be found to be a statement, written out by Sister Agnes, in which will be given such

details of her early life as she has deemed needful for the complete elucidation of the facts that she was desirous of submitting for our consideration. Of those details I myself have no knowledge; but with her relations towards you and Lady Chillington I was made acquainted several years ago under the seal of confession. With your permission, we will now proceed to an examination of the contents of the box."

Father Spiridion opened the box slowly and reverently, as though he could not forget that it had been last closed by the fingers of the dead. Of the contending emotions by which Janet was agitated it would be vain to attempt any analysis. She sat with one hand clasped rigidly in the other, her large luminous eyes fixed steadfastly on Father Spiridion, her bosom rising and falling rather faster than common, but looking in other respects as cold and statuesque as though she had been cut out of some beautiful stone.

The first article produced by Father Spiridion from the box was a miniature, painted on ivory, of an exceedingly handsome young man, with initials in filigree silver at the back. The next article was a large old-fashioned gold locket, containing hair of two different colours, worked into the form of a true-lover's knot. Then came a worn wedding-ring. Then a marriage certificate, the writing of which was faded and yellow with age. Next, two or three love-letters, signed with the same initials, "E. F.," as were on the back of the miniature. Last of all came several sheets of paper stitched together, and folded across and endorsed:—

"A CONFESSION.

"To be read by my daughter, Janet Hope; by my old and faithful friend, Major Strickland; and by my father-confessor, Father Spiridion; by them, and by no one else."

Each article as it was produced from the box was, after a cursory examination, handed over to Janet. She gazed at the portrait and the locket with no other sign of outward emotion than a closer knitting of her brows. The wedding-ring she kissed passionately. The certificate she read carefully twice over, and her face flushed as she read. Then she refolded it and put it calmly down in its place on the table. The love-letters were merely glanced at, and were then left for future consideration. The Confession itself Janet took into her hands for a moment. She recognised the writing at once. With a deep sigh, she gave it back to the priest.

"Read it aloud, dear Father Spiridion, if you please," she said.

The old man rubbed his spectacles slowly and solemnly, as befitted the occasion, placed them carefully astride his nose, and after a preliminary cough, took up the paper and read what follows:—

"MY DARLING JANET,—It is not intended that these lines shall meet your eye till the hand that writes them is mingled with the dust

from which it came. I have been driven to write what is here set down by some inward influence—by some occult power working through me, and giving me no rest till I promised myself that it should be done. For myself, I have done with the world and its active duties long ago. I have no longer any interest in it, except in so far as I may be permitted to watch over your fortunes, to love you with the secret love of a mother who dares not acknowledge her child, and to perform such small works of charity among the sick and poor as my humble means may allow of. But as regards you, the case is altogether different. You are on the verge of womanhood, and life, with all its struggles and temptations, is still before you. To lift up and clear away the mystery that has enveloped your childhood and youth, to inform you what your real position is in that great world into which you are about to enter, is therefore an act of the simplest justice, and one which ought no longer to be delayed. Unfortunately, the revelation is one which I am forbidden to make while I am alive; but I am advised that in the form of a written confession it may be received by you after my death. These remarks will be better understood by you when you shall have read the whole of what I am now about to set down.

"I was born at Deepley Walls, the youngest of three children. My brother Charles, who died in India at the age of twenty, was two years older, and my sister Eudoxia, who died when she was fourteen, was six years older than I. When I was three years old I was sent for by my father's half-sister, a rich maiden lady who lived at Beckley, in Cumberland. It was understood that I was to be regarded as her adopted child, and that some day the great bulk of her fortune would come to me. Of my father I remember next to nothing. I never saw him again after going to live at Beckley. I have been told, and I have reason to believe it true, that he disliked me, and was glad to be rid of me for ever. In this respect my sister fared worse than I did. My father disliked her almost as much as he disliked me; but poor Eudoxia had no rich aunt to release her from a tyranny that was driving her slowly into the grave.

"My father, Sir John Chillington, was a man of strong passions; cruel and unbending to a degree where he could be so with impunity. He and my mother were ill-matched. Knowing as you do, what Lady Chillington is now, how proud, stern and unyielding, with yet occasional capricious fits of kindness and generous feeling, you will readily understand how her married life was one of perpetual discord and soul-fretting unhappiness. At length she and my father separated in consequence of a disagreement respecting my brother, and they never saw each other again till my father lay dying. He carried his dislike of my mother beyond the grave, in ordering that his body should be kept unburied for twenty years; that it should remain under whatever roof my mother might choose to make her permanent residence during that time; and that my mother should visit it in

person at least once a week during the whole period of twenty years, should her life be spared for so long a time.

"In the seclusion of Beckley, the items of news that reached us from Deepley Walls were few and far between. I had never been encouraged to write to either of my parents, and neither of them ever thought of writing to me. A coldly-worded letter once every six months from my aunt to her brother, and an equally cold reply a month or two afterwards, were the sole links that bound me to those I would fain have loved but could not. At the age of seventeen I knew or remembered little more of my parents than I should have done had they died on the day I left Deepley Walls. Had they really been dead I should have cherished their memory, and thought tenderly of them; but since they were alive, their cold neglect chilled me to the heart, and withered every flower of love that ought to have flourished there.

"But I was not unhappy. Although my life at Beckley was one of almost conventual seclusion, and although my aunt was a woman of unsympathetic nature and ascetic disposition, the springs of youth were fresh within me, and who could tell what happiness the future might not have in store? The situation of the house was a very lonely one, and there being so little that was attractive to me within doors, it cannot be wondered at that nearly the whole of my spare time was spent among the glorious moors and fells by which we were shut in on every side. My aunt never made any objection to my long solitary rambles: solitude was congenial to herself; she loved best to be alone, and to her it seemed only natural and proper that my disposition in such things should bear some resemblance to her own.

"It was on the occasion of one of these lonely rambles that I first encountered Mr. Fairfax. He had been out fishing, and was crossing the moor a little way behind me on his road to the nearest village, when a sudden thunderstorm came on. In three minutes I should have been drenched to the skin. Mr. Fairfax saw the emergency, hurried up, apologised, introduced himself, and insisted on my acceptance of his waterproof till the rain should have ceased. I loved him from that first time of seeing him. We met again and again. If a man's oaths may ever be trusted, he loved me in return. I listened and believed. He asked me to elope with him, and I told him that if he would make me his wife I would follow him to the end of the world. He said: 'It will be my dearest happiness to make you my wife, only you must give me your solemn promise never to reveal your marriage without having first obtained my permission to do so. Family reasons compel me to ask this sacrifice.' To make such a promise implied no sacrifice on my part; it was not his family but himself that I was about to marry, and to my mind there was something very delicious in the thought of being a participant in so important a secret.

"But why go into details?—although I could linger over this part of my story for years. It is sufficient to say that we eloped, and that we were married the same day at Whitehaven, a few miles away. A friend of Mr. Fairfax, named Captain Lant, gave me away. The only other witness to our marriage was the old pew-opener. Immediately after the marriage we bade farewell to Captain Lant, and went northward into Scotland. After a happy month spent in the Highlands we came South. I would fain have stopped to see the wonders of London, of which I had heard so much at different times, but Mr. Fairfax would only agree to pass one night there, after which we at once set out for the Continent. Avoiding Paris and all the large towns, but lingering here and there in some sweet country nook, we came at length to the borders of the Lake of Lucerne. Half a mile inland, but overlooking the lake, and out of the ordinary track of tourists, we found a tiny villa that was in want of a tenant. Mr. Fairfax took it for a term of six months, and there we settled down.

"Before leaving Scotland my husband had allowed me to write to my father, and also to my aunt, informing them of my marriage, but mentioning neither my husband's name, nor the place where we were then living. If any answers were sent, they were to be addressed to me under my maiden name at one of the London district post-offices. When we reached town, my husband sent to the office in question. There was only one letter for me. It was from my father, and contained, as enclosures, my letters to himself and to my aunt. His reply was a cruel one. In it he told me that he had disowned me for ever. That to him and to my mother I was as though I had never lived; or rather, as though I had died on my wedding morn. That they had put on mourning for me, and looked upon me in all respects as one dead. Finally, he forbade me ever to communicate with him again, either by letter, or in any other way.

"This letter cut me to the quick. In what way it affected my husband I was unable to judge. He read it through in silence, and then tossed it contemptuously on one side; nor did he ever allude to it in any way again.

"I had been so accustomed from childhood upward to exist on such a very small modicum of love that the sting implanted by my father's letter would have made no enduring wound had the great compensation of a husband's enduring love been granted me in place of that which I had lost. It is true that I was married, and that I had a husband who loved me; but his love was not of that kind on which my heart could rest as on a rock against which all the storms of life would beat in vain. Mr. Fairfax, when he married me, meant that his love should be of the strong and enduring kind; but by what magic at our command shall we change freestone into granite, or chalk into marble? How could I blame Mr. Fairfax for the non-possession of a quality which Nature had utterly denied him?

Constancy was a virtue that he might dimly comprehend, but which he altogether failed to reduce into the practice of his daily life.

"The pretty castle I had built on my wedding-day proved to be of the veriest mushroom growth. The enchanted prince who was to have dwelt happily in it his whole life long refused to be confined within such narrow limits, and razed its golden walls to the ground with a sneer.

"However much I might repine in secret for the loss of that which could never be mine again, I made no complaint in words. I bore all in proud silence: my husband never heard a single murmur from my lips. The decay of his love was not a matter of a day or a week. It was slow, gradual, sure. I sometimes found myself morbidly trying to calculate how long a time would elapse before its last grains would vanish as the million that had gone before had vanished, leaving nothing but cold indifference behind. There was some slight touch of comfort in after days in knowing that those few last grains were still mine on that morning when I saw him for the last time.

"We had lived nearly twelve months on the banks of Lucerne. During that time my husband had made two journeys to London, on both occasions being away from me exactly fourteen days. He never said a word to me as to the nature of the business which called him away, and I was too proud to ask him. Although his wife, I knew absolutely nothing respecting his antecedents, his actual position in society, or what relatives he had and who they were. I had married him without asking to be enlightened on such matters, and he took care afterwards that my ignorance should remain undisturbed. I knew that there was some mystery in the case. He had told me as much as that when asking me to swear not to reveal the fact of our marriage to anyone without his express sanction. More than that I did not seek to know. What did it matter to me who or what this man's relations were, when the love with which he had bound me to himself was slowly breaking link by link? But what I did secretly resent was the fact that all letters addressed to him were fetched by himself personally from the nearest post-office; and all letters written by him were written furtively, as it were, so that not a line of their contents should be seen by me, and were likewise posted by himself so that no second pair of eyes should see how they were addressed.

"At length there came a day when Mr. Fairfax received a letter which seemed to trouble him more than any he had ever received before during the brief time I had been his wife. I had no means of judging by whom it was written. He read it over at least twenty times, and each time its perusal seemed to leave him more puzzled than he had been before. Then he put it away, and I did not see it again. But during the two days that followed before he answered it there was something in his manner which told me how deeply that letter was centred in his thoughts. Two or three days still later he announced to me that he was going on a sketching expedition, and

that he might be away for a couple of weeks. It was not the first time he had made a similar excuse for leaving me, but he had never before been away for so long a time. Whenever Mr. Fairfax was absent, a certain Signora Trachini, the widow of a poor Italian gentleman, came and kept me company at the villa till his return. This time also she came, with her needles and her immense balls of cotton, and her well-thumbed breviary. Then my husband, having packed up all things requisite for his expedition, bade me a more than ordinarily affectionate farewell, and left me. I watched him down the winding road that leads to the lake, a peasant trudging behind with his luggage. At the corner where the large orange tree grows, he turned and waved his hand. And that was the last that I ever saw of Edmund Fairfax."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CONFESSION CONTINUED.

"My husband had been about three days gone when bad weather set in. For several hours the lake was lashed by a wild storm of wind and rain. Then the rain ceased, and fitful gleams of sunshine lighted up the landscape, but the wind still blew in fierce, troubled gusts, and so continued for several days. On the sixth day after my husband's departure I was surprised by a visit from Captain Lant, whom I had not seen since my wedding-day. He was very grave, but there was nothing in his looks from which I could augur that he was the bearer of ill news. He was not a man whom I could ever have liked, but I bade him welcome for my husband's sake. His first words told me that I had lost that husband for ever. Mr. Fairfax had been drowned during the storm three days before, while out sketching in a small boat on the Lake of Zurich. His body had been recovered; had been recognised by Captain Lant, in whose company my husband was making the excursion, but who had not been on the lake; and had been buried the following morning in the churchyard nearest the scene of the accident. In corroboration of his story, Captain Lant brought me my husband's vest, his purse, his ring, his watch, his pencil-case, and a small pocket-book, the whole of which articles had the appearance of having been in the water for several hours. I could not doubt the truth of his tale.

"Captain Lant stayed with me, and did all that could be done to facilitate my arrangements for leaving the villa and returning to England. Among the luggage which my husband had not taken with him was found a pocket-book containing bank-notes to the value of two hundred pounds. The notes were sealed up in an envelope that was endorsed with my name, and had these words written below: 'In case of any accident happening to myself.' This proof of my husband's affectionate forethought touched me to the

quick. He might have had a presentiment of the terrible ending that was so soon to befall him.

"Before Captain Lant and I parted we had a long conversation together. I told him that I knew nothing whatever of my late husband's social position, nor whether he had a single relative in the world. On these two points I was desirous that Captain Lant should afford me some information, but he professed to be as ignorant in the matter as I was. Although Mr. Fairfax and he had been very good friends, their friendship was only a thing of three years' growth, and of my husband's antecedents he could say nothing with certainty. He himself believed him to have been the son of a small farmer in the South of England, and that his money had come to him from a rich uncle. Further than that he professed to know nothing, and with this scanty information I was obliged to rest satisfied. Captain Lant and I parted at the diligence office. He was going forward to Rome, while all my desire was to get back to England.

"On feeling for my notes a few minutes after landing from the steamer, I found that they had been stolen. I had omitted to take the numbers of them, and the police could do nothing to assist me. Four sovereigns and some loose silver was all the money I had in the world. After a couple of days spent at a quiet boarding-house in London, I set out for Deepley Walls. It was late in autumn, and the weather was excessively cold. There was no railway in those days, and the coach by which I had to travel was full inside. I travelled outside, and had to be lifted down at Eastbury, so benumbed was I with the intense cold. No news from home had reached me during the time of my sojourn on the Continent, and now, at the Eastbury hotel, I heard for the first time that my father was dead. I heard it to all outward seeming as a stranger might have heard it; none there knew who I was.

"I parted with my last half-crown at the hotel, and then I set out to walk the three miles to Deepley Walls. You must bear in mind that I had not been at the hall since I was four years old, and that, consequently, the way was entirely strange to me. I did not leave the little town till dusk, and the snow was falling fast by the time I got fairly out into the country lanes. I inquired at one or two cottages by the way, but I must have wandered far out of the direct road, for when I at length reached Deepley Walls, wet through and half dead with cold and fatigue, the turret clock was just striking twelve. The house loomed vast and dark before me, with nowhere a single ray of light to bid me welcome. My heart grew faint within me. I lay down under the portico and prayed that I might die. How long I had lain thus I cannot tell, when I was roused to partial consciousness by hearing a sound as if some metallic substance had fallen on to the flagged floor of the hall inside. Then I heard faint sounds as if someone were moving

about in the darkness, and presently a dim thread of light shone from under the door. As I afterwards learned, my mother had been to pay her customary visit to the Black Room upstairs, and in returning across the hall had dropped her lamp to the ground. On seeing the thread of light I staggered to my feet, and beat with both my hands against the door. Then a voice cried out, 'Who are you? and what do you want?'

"My name is Helen Fairfax," I replied, "and I want to see Lady Chillington."

"There was a dead silence for full two minutes, then I heard the rustle of a silk dress, and presently the great bolts were drawn one by one, and then the door of my lost home was flung wide open, but not for me to enter. On the threshold stood a tall figure, dark and threatening, dark except for the white hands, gemmed with rings, one of which held on high a small antique lamp, and the white face full of wrath and menace.

"I am Lady Chillington," said this phantom, in a cold, passionless voice. 'Once more I ask, Who are you?'

"Your daughter, madam. Helena, your unhappy child."

"My daughter Helena died and was buried long ago. You may be her ghost for aught I know or care. In any case, this is no place for you; within this door you can never enter; under this roof you can never come. Go! I have no daughter. I am childless and a widow."

"But, madam—mother, hear me! I am your daughter—I —"

"I tell you that I have no daughter," she interrupted, in her cold, imperative way. 'My daughter fell into shame, and then to me she became as utterly dead as if the ocean were rolling over her bones: dead in heart and dead in memory. You are an impostor. Go!'

"Oh! mother, listen to me. I am not an impostor. I am your own daughter Helena. No shame clings to my name. My husband is dead, and this is the only place in the wide world where I can ask for shelter or a crust of bread."

"Not so much as a crust of bread shall you ever have from me. You know my will. Go at once and never darken this door again. When you die, may you die uncared for and unknown! May your eyes be closed by the hands of strangers, and may the hands of strangers lay you in your grave! Go!'

"Speaking thus, Lady Chillington faded back into the darkness. Slowly and resistlessly the door was closed; slowly and deliberately the great bolts were pushed into their sockets; the silk dress rustled; the ribbon of light shone for a moment under the door; then all was darkness and silence, and I was alone.

"I crept away from the cruel door into the less cruel night. The night and the snow seemed like friends that would wrap me

round, and tend me, and hush me into a sleep that should know no waking in this bitter world. I was as one on whose soul sits some awful nightmare which makes him seem, even in his own eyes, something other than himself. I knew that the woman who had smitten me with those cruel words was my mother, but I was past wondering at that, or at anything else. All that had befallen me was only in the common course of events, and it was quite right and proper that I should be walking there alone at that hour, with my back turned to the roof that should have sheltered me, and with no spot in all the wide world on which I could claim to lay my head. In my heart there was no bitterness; only a dull, vague longing for peace and rest and a deep winding-sheet of snow. There was something within me that would allow me neither pause nor rest till I had left the park of Deepley Walls behind. I had shunned the ordinary lodge-entrance, and had gained access to the grounds through a stile in a bye-lane, connected with which is a right of footpath across one corner of the estate. I went back by the same road, and at length recognised in a bewildered sort of way that I was out of the park and had all the world before me where to choose. A light snow was still falling, but the wind had died down, and with it had gone that intensity of cold from which I had suffered before. I dragged myself slowly onward, but more by a sort of instinct than by any exertion of will. But beyond this point I have no clear recollection of anything. I only know that when I woke up I found myself in the Home of the Sisterhood of Good Works, to which place I had been conveyed by a charitable carrier who had found me lying insensible in the snow.

"There I lay very ill for a long time. During one part of my illness my mind wandered, and from certain words I let drop at that time, the Sisterhood were induced to write to Lady Chillington. She—my mother—came. She saw me when I was unconscious of her presence, and she saw me afterwards when I was slowly coming back to life and health. Then was the unwritten compact entered into by which it was agreed that when sufficiently recovered I should go and live at Deepley Walls, not as the daughter of its mistress, but, under the assumed name of Sister Agnes, as Lady Chillington's paid companion and very humble friend.

"In the meantime you, my darling Janet, had been born. I nursed you myself till you were six months old. Then Lady Chillington insisted on your being put out, and on my going to live at Deepley Walls. But previously to doing this her ladyship extorted from me a double promise. First, never by word, look or deed to reveal to anyone the fact of the relationship between herself and me. Secondly, never till my dying day to reveal either to you or to anyone else the fact that you and I were mother and daughter. This double promise was not made by me without first consulting those whose opinions I was bound to revere. At that time I looked upon

the promise as a penalty in part for the errors of my life. Since that time I have often felt inclined to doubt the wisdom of having made it. The penalty has been a far heavier one than I thought it would be. To see you, my daughter, the one sweet flower that has blossomed out of my withered life, to see you and know you as my own, and yet not to dare to claim you as such, surely that was too great a penance for one weak mortal to bear!

"My narrative is nearly at a close. By the time you have read thus far you will understand why you were brought up at Miss Chinfeather's academy, and why you were sent from that place to Deepley Walls. Lady Chillington's strange treatment will also in part be understood by you. You were a disturbing element in that fossilised life to which she had become accustomed. Still, if I have read her character aright, you, her grand-daughter, are far more precious in her sight than I, her daughter, ever was. I am very very happy to think that such is the case; and I have sometimes ventured to hope that after I shall be gone, you and she may be drawn still more closely together. That the withered ashes of her affections may yet derive some vital heat from the generous impulses of your heart. That her pride may give way sufficiently to induce her to place you in your proper position in the world, and to allow your hands, as being those of the one nearest and dearest to her, to tend her lovingly on that downward path which she and I are alike treading; and of which the end can be no great distance away.

"I have necessarily left one of the most important points of my narrative till the last.

"When Captain Lant told me that he knew nothing positive as to the antecedents of your father, but that he believed him to have been the son of a small farmer in the south of England, and that his money had been left him by a rich uncle, I believed him implicitly. But during the long solitary years by which my life has been marked since that time, I have gone back in thought a thousand times to those few brief wedded months, and have brooded over all the circumstances by which they were surrounded. One result of this perpetual brooding has been that I have learned in my own mind to distrust the statement made by Captain Lant. I cannot believe that Mr. Fairfax was the son of a small farmer. He was a gentleman, and had about him all the signs of one who had been brought up amongst gentlefolk. From hints and odd words dropped by him at different times and afterwards recalled by me in memory, I gathered that he had travelled extensively, that he had been at college, that he was a member of one or two West-end clubs, that he had at one time kept his own hunters, and that he was personally known to several people of rank. In all this there was nothing that betrayed the farmer's son.

"From this conviction—not arrived at in a day or a month—of Captain Lant's untruthfulness, a suspicion has gradually forced itself

upon me—and at the present moment it is nothing more than a suspicion—that the entire story of Mr. Fairfax's sudden death was neither more nor less than a clever fabrication to get rid of a woman for whom he no longer cared. It may seem cruel to you, my dear Janet, even to hint at such a thing in connection with a man whose memory you ought to revere, especially as I have not the slightest atom of positive proof on which to base such a suspicion. But now, if ever, the whole truth must be told you. About all Captain Lant's statements there was an air of unreality which did not strike me so forcibly at the time as it did afterwards, when I went back in recollection over the events of that terrible time. Sometimes the suspicion that I was nothing more than the victim of a clever lie would deepen in my mind till it almost assumed the proportions of a certainty. At other times it would wither and lose all its vivid colouring, and seem nothing more than the dream of a distempered brain. It might have been nothing more than such a dream for any action I have taken in it to prove either its truth or its falsity. My love for Mr. Fairfax died out long ago, and nothing could revivify the cold ashes. If he were not really dead, but merely wished to cast me off, he had attained his end, and so enough. Had it been possible to lure him back to my side, the wish to do so had long passed away. I coveted neither riches nor position: my life had aims that were directed elsewhere.

"But with you, my daughter, the case is entirely different. You hold your position at Deepley Walls by a precarious tenure. Lady Chillington is a woman of capricious temper and inflexible will. She might choose to turn you adrift to-morrow: to cast you on the world, helpless and alone. On the other hand, she may have made adequate provision for you in the case of anything happening to herself. But this is a matter respecting which I am entirely ignorant, and were I to speak to her respecting it I should only be scouted for my pains. It is true that you are nearer to her in blood than anyone now living (I am writing of myself as though I were already dead), but a woman of Lady Chillington's peculiar disposition is just as likely as not to repudiate any claim which might have its origin in that fact; and it must be borne in mind that the absolute disposal of Deepley Walls, and any other property she may be possessed of, is vested entirely in her own hands.

"Under these perplexing circumstances, and with a future on which your foothold is so insecure, it has sometimes seemed to me that the wisest plan with regard to your interests would be to endeavour to unravel the mystery by which the antecedents and social position of your father are surrounded. Behind the cloud with which Mr. Fairfax chose to enshroud his life previously to our marriage, friends, relatives, fortune, happiness, may all await you, his child. So at least my dreams have run at times; and dreams at times come true.

"The terms of my oath to Lady Chillington forbade me from making any such inquiry on my own account, but in this matter you are entirely unfettered. If, therefore, your friends and counsellors, Major Strickland and Father Spiridion, think it desirable that such an investigation should be made in your interests, place the matter unreservedly in their hands, and leave them to deal with it in whatever way they may think best. That its issue may prove to be for your welfare and happiness is your dying mother's fervent prayer.

"Further, should my vague suspicion that Mr. Fairfax did not meet his death at the time and under the circumstances as told me by Captain Lant prove to have some foundation in fact, and should the story turn out to have been merely an invention to get rid of a wife who had become burdensome to him, in such a case your father is probably still among the living. Should such prove to be the fact, it is by no means unlikely that the daughter of his discarded wife might be cherished and welcomed by him as even the child of a happier marriage might not be. Should the future give you a father—one who will welcome you with open hand and open heart—go to him and be to him as a daughter. Forget your mother's wrongs: on this point I solemnly charge you: let the dead past bury its dead. Be dutiful and loving as a daughter ought to be, and leave it for a Higher Power to set straight that which is crooked, and to weigh the human heart aright.

"You have been known all these years as Janet Hope, but your real name, the one by which you were baptised, is Janet Fairfax. When you were sent away to Miss Chinfeather's seminary, it was necessary that your name should be enrolled in the books of that establishment. My mother would not allow you to go either by the name of Miss Fairfax or Miss Chillington. My own name being Helena Hope Chillington, my mother chose that you should be designated and known as Janet Hope, and in this, as in every other matter, her wishes were acceded to.

"I need hardly tell you that the miniature contained in the box in which I shall deposit this paper is that of your father, nor that the wedding-ring, which you will find near it, is the one he placed on my finger the day he took me for his wife. The relics brought me by Captain Lant as proofs of your father's death I was unfortunate enough to lose during my journey back to England.

"And now, dear Janet, my story is told."

[The few remaining pages of Sister Agnes's confession are omitted as having no bearing on the history of the Great Hara Diamond. They consisted of tender confidences and loving advice, and as such are sacred to the eyes of her for whom they were written.]

CHAPTER XXIX.

MADGIN JUNIOR'S SECOND REPORT.

"MY DEAR DAD,—Your letter in reply to my first report reached my hands a week ago. It had been lying three days at the post-office before I had an opportunity of fetching it. I am glad to find that you approve of my proceedings, and think, all things considered, that I have not made bad use of my time. That you are sanguine as to the ultimate result of my mission here shows a buoyancy of disposition on your part that would not discredit any dashing young blade of twenty. I hope that your opinion will be still further confirmed when you shall have read that which I have now to put down.

"I may just remind you that I have now been at Bon Repos a month all but two days, and but for a fortunate accident the object for which I was sent here would still be as far from its accomplishment as on the day of my arrival. Even now it will rest with you to decide whether what I have to communicate is of any real value, or advances even by a single step the great end we have in view. Privately, I may tell you that I think the same great end all fudge. My faith is very lukewarm indeed as to the existence of the diamond. But even granting its existence, the present possessor, whoever he may be, were he aware of our petty machinations, would laugh them utterly to scorn.

"Your reply to this would probably be that since the unknown possessor of the diamond is not cognisant of our machinations, we have an incalculable advantage on our side. To which I venture to observe that we are tilting at shadows—that both the diamond and its owner are myths, and have no foundation in fact. And now that I have made my protest, and so eased my mind, I will proceed with my narration of what has happened at Bon Repos since the date of my last report.

"The fortunate accident of which I made mention a few lines above is neither more nor less than the serious illness of Cleon. As a consequence of this event I have been brought into closer relations with M. Platzoff. Before entering into particulars, I may just add that the stranger, Captain Ducie, is still here; but his visit, so Cleon informs me, is now drawing to a close. As I informed you before, Cleon, for some reason best known to himself, has contracted an intense dislike for the Captain, and before I had been a week at Bon Repos he had set me to act as a spy on his actions. I have watched him as far as it has been possible to do so with safety. What little I have discovered is not worth setting down here; in fact, I may say that I have discovered nothing more singular in the Captain's mode of life than would appear upon the surface of any ordinary life that was closely watched by someone who lacked the key to the

motives with which its purposes were animated. I have, then, made no actual discovery of facts as regards Captain Ducie. But for all that, a dim suspicion has grown up in my mind, having birth I cannot tell how or when, that the Captain is not without certain private designs of his own on M. Platzoff, although of what those designs may consist I have not the remotest idea. Gentlemanly man as the Captain is, there is about him a certain faint soupçon of the adventurer, and my first suspicion of some design on Platzoff may have had its rise in that fact. At all events, I have no better based facts to go upon—nothing that I can set down in black and white. For my own sake more than for Cleon's, I have determined to still retain my watch on the Captain. Time only can tell whether or no my doing so will in any way advance our interests.

"Cleon had been ailing for some days, but kept going about his duties as usual. One morning, however, he sent for me, and told me that he was too ill to rise, and that such portion of his duties for the day as could not be postponed must be gone through by me in his stead. Such duties would chiefly be those arising from personal attendance on M. Platzoff. I could see that he was terribly put about.

"‘My master is such a particular man,’ he said. ‘I have never missed waiting on him a single day these twenty years. How he will like a stranger to go through the little indispensable offices of the toilet for him is more than I dare think of. However, in the present case there is no help for it, and you may take it as a proof of the confidence I have in you that I have selected you, a comparative stranger, to act as my deputy for the time being.’

"He then gave me a silver pass-key, which he told me would open the whole suite of private rooms occupied by M. Platzoff. He then impressed certain instructions on my mind, a minute observance of which, he said, would go some way towards reconciling M. Platzoff to the temporary loss of his, Cleon's, services. ‘The private apartments,’ he finished up by saying, ‘consist of four rooms en suite. The first of them is the smoking-room; the second the dressing and bath-room; the third the bed-room; lastly comes a small private library or sanctum, the walls lined with books, which there will be no need for you to enter. Take the pass-key and open the doors of the smoking and dressing-rooms. When you reach the bed-room give three separate taps at the door with the handle of the key. M. Platzoff will then bid you enter. But before going in you must speak to him, and tell him that I am ill, and that I have deputed you, with his permission, to act in my stead. Even then do not go in till he bids you enter. Were you to enter unannounced you might come to grief. M. Platzoff always keeps a loaded revolver close by his pillow. In the sudden excitement of seeing a strange face near him, he might unfortunately make use of it. If he bid you not to enter, come back to me, and I will consider what further must be done. On second

thoughts, I will write a line of explanation for you to take with you. It may serve to allay any doubts M. Platzoff might feel as to the acceptance of your services.'

"I gave him pen and ink. Not without difficulty he wrote the following words, which he read to me after they were written:—

"I am too ill this morning to rise from my bed. Unless this were really the case, you may be sure that my customary services would not be foregone. I am obliged to send you a stranger—that is, a person who is a stranger to you. You may place implicit confidence in him. I hope to be with you again to-morrow.

"CLEON."

"The style seemed to me a strangely familiar one in which to address his employer. But Cleon was not a man to do anything without a motive. In the present case he doubtless knew thoroughly what he was about.

"I took the pass-key, opened and went through the first and second rooms, and knocked at the door of the third. 'Enter,' said the voice of M. Platzoff from within. Then in the most respectful tone I could summon for the occasion I repeated the formula composed for me by Cleon. There was complete silence for full two minutes. Then M. Platzoff spoke. 'Come in,' he said, 'and let me see who you are.' I unlocked and opened the door, and then stood for a few moments on the threshold. The room was nearly in total darkness. The venetians were down and thick curtains drawn in front of them. A faint, sickly odour came through the doorway like that of some strongly aromatic drug. 'Come forward and open the blinds,' said a peremptory voice from the bed. I obeyed, and let in the cheerful daylight. 'I have a line from Mr. Cleon for you, sir,' I said, 'if you will kindly read it.' 'Give it me here,' he said. 'Cleon ill! The world must be coming to an end. I thought that fellow was made of cast-iron and could never get out of order.'

"I gave him the note. He opened it and read it with the assistance of his eyeglass. I seized the opportunity for a quiet glance round. If I were an upholsterer, my dear dad, which, thank goodness, I am not, I would draw you up a brief inventory of the contents of M. Platzoff's bedroom. As circumstances are, I can only say that it was by far the most elegantly-fitted sleeping-room which it had ever been my fortune to enter. In parenthesis, I may remark that in passing through the smoke-room I had been much struck with the richness and elegance of its decorations. It is fitted up in a semi-Oriental fashion, and excepting that everything in it is real and of the best quality, it looks more like a theatrical apartment fitted up for stage purposes than a real room in a country gentleman's house. Since that time I have become familiarised with the entire suite, and have picked up one or two ideas for interiors which may prove of service to my friend Davis of the Tabard.

"With an impatient 'Pish!' M. Platzoff tossed the note from him as soon as he had mastered its contents. He cut quite a comical figure as he lay there, his yellow skin looking yellower than ordinary in contrast with the white bed-furniture. His wizened face puckered into a scowl of perplexity. His blue-black chin-tuft rough and out of shape, and his cheeks and upper lip grimy for want of a razor. A conical nightcap like an extinguisher on his head, and his *robe-de-nuit* fal-lal'd with lace, as though he were some dainty bride of twenty. I could have laughed outright, but I took care to do nothing of the kind.

"'What is your name, sir? and how long have you been at Bon Repos?' he demanded, with a sort of contemptuous anger in his voice.

"'My name is James Jasmin, sir, at your service; and I have been here just one month.'

"'One month! one month!' he shrieked. 'Then what, in the fiend's name, does Cleon mean by writing that he has implicit confidence in you? Who are you? and where do you come from? How can one have implicit confidence in a man whom one has only known for four weeks? Cleon must take me for a fool.'

"'My name I have already told you, sir. Before coming here, I was in service with Mr. Madgin, of Deepley Walls.'

"M. Platzoff's face turned from yellow to green as I uttered these words. 'From Deepley Walls, did you say?' he gasped. 'From Deepley Walls in Midlandshire?'

"'That is the place, sir.' He evidently knew something about Deepley Walls, but how much or how little, was the question. I felt myself on the brink of an abyss. Was I about to be kicked out of Bon Repos as an impostor?

"'But—but I have always understood that a certain Lady Chillington was the owner of Deepley Walls?'

"'Lady Chillington is the owner, sir, but she does not live at the hall, but at a cottage in the park; the house has been let for several years back to Mr. Madgin.'

"'And how long have you been in the employ of this Mr. Madgin?'

"'Since I was quite a boy, sir.'

"'Then why have you left him?'

"'Because he is going to reside on the Continent, and is about to break up his English establishment.'

"'Then you are acquainted with Lady Chillington?'

"'Only from seeing her frequently, sir. I have never spoken to her. She is very old now, and lives a very secluded life.'

"'Has she any of her children living with her?'

"'I am not aware that her ladyship has any children. I have heard speak of one son who died in India many years ago.'

"'Ah!' Then, after a pause: 'Well, Mr. James Jasmin, I will

accept your services for the present ; but I hope to goodness that Cleon is not going to be laid up for any length of time. Ring the bell for my shaving water, and reach me that dressing-gown.'

"Congratulate me, my dear dad, on the dexterity with which I extricated myself from a difficulty that in more awkward hands might readily have proved fatal.

"It is not requisite that I should enter into any details of the minor duties I had to perform for M. Platzoff. They were the ordinary duties of a body servant, and it is sufficient to say that I got through them without making any very egregious blunder. That I am still engaged in the same capacity is a tolerable proof that M. Platzoff is not dissatisfied with my services ; for Cleon has not yet recovered and, although somewhat better, is still confined to his bed. Platzoff is not a difficult man to serve under. He does not treat his people like dogs, as I have heard of many so-called gentlemen doing. Only attend well to his minor comforts, and do not keep him waiting for anything, and you will never hear a wrong word from him.

"Midnight is, with certain exceptions, M. Platzoff's fixed hour for going to bed. My instructions are to go every night at twelve precisely ; to give a low treble knock on the door of the smoke-room, and then with the aid of the pass-key to go in. I then relieve M. Platzoff of his pipe, generally a large Turkish hookah ; accompany him to his dressing-room, and take his instructions for the morning. After that I put out the lights, and then my duties for the day are over.

"But once, sometimes twice, a week M. Platzoff is in the habit of smoking opium, or some drug so much like it that I cannot tell the difference. Whatever it may be, he smokes it till he falls into a sort of trance, in which he is unconscious of everything going on around him. My instructions are that when, on entering the smoke-room at midnight, I find him in such a trance, not to disturb him, but to watch by him till I see certain signs that the trance is abating. As soon as these signs show themselves, I lift M. Platzoff bodily up and carry him to bed, and so leave him till morning. One of Cleon's most important duties was the charging of M. Platzoff's pipe when the latter was going to have one of his opium séances ; but that is too nice an operation to be entrusted to my unskilled hands, and in the absence of Cleon is, I presume, gone through by the Russian himself.

"My bed-room adjoins that of Cleon, and on two or three occasions it has happened that I have been summoned by him in the middle of the night to answer M. Platzoff's private bell, which rings in his room. On answering this bell as Cleon's deputy, I have found that M. Platzoff, not being able to sleep, has summoned me to read to him, or to assist him on with his dressing-gown, and to light his pipe for him.

"'But,' you will perhaps observe, 'what has all this rigmarole to do with the question of the Great Hara Diamond?'

"I reply that, in all probability, it has nothing whatever to do with it. But I think it requisite that you should know the details of my life at Bon Repos. Secondly, you must let me say what I have to say after my own fashion. And, thirdly, the curious incident I have now to record would hardly be comprehensible to you without the preliminary details here given.

"Last night, or rather about two o'clock this morning, came one of those untimely summonses of which I have made mention above. I was aroused by Cleon's tapping on the wall that divides our bedrooms. I shuffled into a few clothes, anathematising M. Platzoff and the whole business as I did so, and then hurried into Cleon's room. As I expected, M. Platzoff's bell had just rung, and it was requisite that I should go and ascertain what was wanted. I took my pass-key and went. I passed first through the smoking-room, next through the dressing-room, and so into the bed-room, which, to my intense astonishment, I found lighted up with a pair of wax candles, although I had left it in utter darkness barely a couple of hours before. What added to my surprise was the fact that the door between the bed-room and the library was open, and that the latter apartment was also lighted up. Having noted these things with a first intuitive glance round, my second glance went to the bed in search of M. Platzoff. He was not on it. On passing round the foot of the bed, I found him lying with his face on the floor. I lifted him up and saw at once that he was in some sort of fit. I was frightened, but did not lose my presence of mind. I had several times carried him out of the smoking-room when he was in one of his opium trances, and I had no difficulty now in lifting him up and laying him on the bed. As I turned round with the body in my arms, I saw something reflected in a large mirror opposite that nearly caused me to drop M. Platzoff to the ground. What I saw was the reflection from the lighted-up library of an oblong opening like a doorway in the bookshelves with which its walls were lined—an opening which, had it been there, I should hardly have missed noticing before, although I had not been above three or four times in the room. As soon as I had laid the unconscious Russian on his bed, I stole on tip-toe into the library. I had not been mistaken. There *was* an opening in the wall, formed by the sinking into a deep recess of a portion of the bookcase. In the recess thus formed was an iron door, now shut. As I looked, this question, without any consciousness on my own part, was put to me: *Can this be the entrance to some secret room in which the Diamond is hidden?*

"I had no time to consider the probability or otherwise of this question. Certain sounds from the other room drew me back at once to the side of M. Platzoff. Signs of returning consciousness were visible. I propped him up with the pillows, and sprinkled

water on his face, and chafed his hands. Slowly he came back to life. 'Better—better—all right now,' were his first words; then turning his lack-lustre eyes on me, 'Who are you?' he said. 'Ah, I remember—Jasmin,' he continued before I could reply. Then all of a sudden a frightened look came into his face, and he began to fumble nervously in the pocket of his velvet dressing-gown. 'What have you lost, sir? Is it anything I can find for you?' I asked. 'No, no,' he replied excitedly; 'only my key—only my key. Ah! here it is,' he cried a moment later, as he brought into view from one of his pockets a curiously-shaped key, the like of which I had never seen before. With a great sigh of relief he sank back on his pillows.

"Go and wake up Wrigley, and tell him to give you some cognac," he said next minute. 'A little brandy is all I need at present.'

"I left the room to carry out his request, and was not away more than five minutes. As I handed him the cognac I glanced stealthily at the mirror. The opening in the library wall was no longer visible. The mirror reflected an unbroken array of shelves closely packed with books. M. Platzoff had evidently felt himself strong enough to get out of bed and fasten the secret door during my absence.

"He drank a little of the brandy and then told me that I might go back to bed. I proffered to sit up in the next room during the remainder of the night. But he would not hear of it: only, he said, he would have the lights kept burning. I had got my hand on the door when he called me back. 'Look here, Jasmin,' he said. 'It is my particular wish that not to anyone shall you say a single word respecting what has happened to-night. Not even to Cleon must you mention it. Obey me in this and you will find that I shall not forget you. Disobey me, and I shall be sure to hear of it. What say you?'

"Of course I promised all he asked, and he seemed tolerably easy in his mind when I left him. I satisfied Cleon's curiosity with a passable excuse, and then went back to bed.

"M. Platzoff is lying later than usual this morning. Consequently I have an hour or two to myself, which I now employ in finishing this report. Write to me as soon as possible after receipt of it, and let me have your opinion as to what my next step ought to be. Cleon will be able to resume his duties in two or three days, and when that event takes place I shall be relegated to my old position, and shall have little or no personal communication with M. Platzoff.

"Your affectionate Son,

"J. M."

(To be continued.)

RECALLING PAST HAPPINESS.

THE famous lines of Dante which he puts into the mouth of Francesca di Rimini in the fifth Canto of the "Inferno" have been more misquoted and interpreted with purblind perversity than perhaps any others. The lines are—

"Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi nell' tempo felice
Nella miseria."

(There is no greater sorrow than to recall a time of happiness *in misery*). But we have over and over again seen them quoted as though the words, *Nella miseria*, had never been used by the poet, nor even glanced at by him. And yet they are the most important part of the expression. Without them the words would hardly have any definite meaning. Lord Tennyson, in his "Locksley Hall," has borrowed from Dante, but he has some blame to bear in relation to them because he leaves the words "nella miseria" to be understood, whereas they ought to have been expressed with emphasis. For it is not true, and it is not what the poet sings :—

"That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

There is no sorrow necessarily in remembering happier things while we are still happy. The difference between the positive and the superlative degree does not emphasise itself in such a soul-shadowing manner. To recall a happier time may only make the present more roseate, cause a quickening thrill in the blood. It does not cast a shadow, nor emphasise shadows existing. But we all know that light falling alongside a shadow intensifies it—makes it darker, the light of memory casing the black cloud of present misery intensifies it by the sense of contrast. It is the depth of present misery that measures the degree of sorrow in recalling past happiness; and the Laureate has himself in "In Memoriam" far more truly expressed the philosophy of the experience :

"Or is it that the past doth win
A glory from its being far,
And orbs into the perfect star
We saw not when we walked therein."

The misery of the present is exaggerated by the exaggeration of the happiness of the past—both are intensified by being brought into too direct association in the mind; and the very lack of power through effort of will and cheerful activity to dissipate the association produces the morbidity that further and further exaggerates on both sides. Milton said, "To be weak is to be miserable;" and the ideal and morbid

dwelling on and heightening of the impression by sense of contrast is that in which the misery lies. It is only another way of saying what Shakespeare with his cheerful philosophy so often dwelt on

Merely general regrets for opportunities lost, and for time wasted, is not what Dante wishes to express—these are common to all, however free from definite fault or vice of their own, and he who has best used his time will the more keenly feel how much more he might have done. He has the true measure of possibilities and can rigidly apply his standard. The little done only reveals the much that remains to do. A recent writer thus draws one of the distinctions that are implied in what we have said to regain for Dante's phrase in the famous quotation its true place—"Nella Miseria!"—

"To review lost happiness is the saddest work on earth; but to review happiness *lost by our own evil*, this is torment inexpressible. The pain is seldom erased; now and then comparison with those worse than ourselves brings a certain balm to the mind, but soon even this consolation loses its power, and we fall back into 'If I had only done this or that.'"

A. H. JAPP, LL.D.



UNDER THE PINES.

THE solemn song is over, for the wind has left the pines
All silent; with their stately heads drawn up in serried lines;
Their music hushed, as though they wait a message from on high,
They stand like sentinels of God, against the crimson sky.

The afterglow arises now to paint the fading West,
And send its flaming messengers to cry the hour of rest;
Then dark within the encircling Night, the fragrant branches sway;
The sweetest song that they can sing breaks forth at dawn of day.

So still they stand as daylight dies, and twilight beckons Night,
That e'en the passing buzzards pause and, lingering, alight;
While midst the shadowed canopies of never fading green,
The sparkling play of firefly gay, at hide and seek, is seen.

The hush of Night is broken, for the fragrant branches sway
And rustle midst the wandering winds that wait the dawn of day;
Mysterious choirs of voices rise like sea-waves on the shore,
And fill the darkened Pinelands with the ocean's solemn roar.

ADA M. TROTTER.

COUNTESS CLARA.

IT was one morning in last October that my wife, with a rather overdone air of indifference, tossed a large gold-lettered card across the breakfast-table to me. In it, with some surprise and, I do not deny, considerable gratification, I found that the pleasure of my company and that of Mrs. Conyers at dinner was requested by our new neighbours at Castle Beauvoir.

We had called on the Morels soon after their arrival, and they had returned the visit with flattering promptitude; but I had no reason to suppose that our acquaintance had advanced to such a point of intimacy as to warrant an invitation to so special an affair as this. We, in common with half the county round, had been bidden to an At Home at the castle, on the occasion of the heiress's coming of age, but the dinner-party that preceded it was understood to include only the house-party and some very distinguished guests.

"Why should they have asked *us*, Nellie?" I demanded, speculating on the possibility of Mr. Morel having known my brother at Oxford, or met my uncle, the attaché, at Vienna, or perhaps having read and been struck with my article on "The Ethics of Psychology" in the *Contemporary*. It was too much to hope that a new-comer—a man from the City—should be aware of our connection with one of the oldest families in the county——

I broke off my conjectures abruptly. Nellie was not paying the slightest attention, but was gazing intently at her own absurd reflection in the silver coffee-pot, her brow wrinkled in deep calculation.

"Velvet *really* is cheaper than satin in the long run—or good velveteen—you would never know the difference, and Liberty's art shades are *too* lovely! I must send for patterns. What were you saying, dear? I beg your pardon—the invitation? Oh, *that's* Miss Morel's doing, of course; one can see that she decides everything. She took an immense fancy to you, I could see; in fact, she told me so. You look 'so strong and capable,' she whispered, in her queer, shy little way."

"Much obliged. I hope the rest of the family may share that opinion when they require medical attendance. I wonder if Dr. Grimshaw is invited?"

"Only to the At Home. Mrs. Grimshaw will be so savage when she hears we are to dine there, but neither of you will ever be wanted professionally. Miss Morel has been under Sir Humphrey Driver's care since she was a baby. He doesn't seem to have done her much good; she is terribly frail and delicate."

"Spoilt, like most only children. Wants more fresh air and less

coddling. I should stop her tea and carriage exercise, put her on a pony, and send her errands about the country lanes, give her a glass of port wine and a cut of mutton, not too much done, for luncheon."

"Charles! You are simply brutal. However, I wish they would consult you about her. It would be some compensation for the trial to one's feelings of seeing all these strangers here in the place of the poor dear de Beauvoirs."

"We might have waited long enough for an invitation to dinner from the poor dear de Beauvoirs," I commented.

"Perhaps. But one feels for an old family scattered and effaced. The Morels can never be the same to the county."

"I sincerely hope not. The county is to be congratulated on the exchange. The Morels live sober and God-fearing lives—pay their bills, and will subscribe to the Dispensary."

"Money! Money! The first thing and the last in men's minds always," sighed my wife, putting me in the wrong as usual, and we dropped the subject.

When Sir Ralph de Beauvoir of Castle Beauvoir immediately on the death of his father announced his intention of selling the estate that had been in the family for more than five centuries and spending the rest of his days in the more congenial atmosphere of Paris, the county in general and the village of Shotacre in particular felt as if the floodgates of society had indeed burst open, as Sir Leicester Dedlock was wont to observe, and the Throne, Altar, and British Constitution were visibly tottering to their immediate fall. The de Beauvoirs had been for generations "bankrupt in purse and in character worse," better known than respected on the turf, bad landlords, bad neighbours, bad citizens, and alternately fool and blackguard for the last few generations, but they were de Beauvoirs of Beauvoir, a name of splendid traditions, and their glorious past cast a halo that bedazzled the critics of their ignoble present. Shotacre refused to be consoled, and glowered askance at the Morels, the wealthy banker and his family who had the audacity to come and live in the very place which they had paid for.

Even my wife indulged in more than one sigh to the memory of the departed de Beauvoirs as we drove up the long ascent to the Castle on the night of the heiress's birthday. We crossed the mighty drawbridge and entered the Castle-court under the threatening teeth of the portcullis. All was silent and empty. Ours were the only wheels that had furrowed the smooth-swept yellow gravel.

"Have we mistaken the time?" Nellie asked in trepidation.

"Or the day?" I added, fumbling for the invitation card.

The front door was flung open, and a glow of hospitable light issued, in which I made out the date to be correct, and the hour clangd from the clock-tower overhead as we entered. A change

indeed from the de Beauvoirs' time. Dust, must, rust, and cobwebs had disappeared from the great hall. The old, faded, flapping tapestries had been cleaned and properly mounted, the matchless oak carvings of the staircase carefully restored, there were Oriental rugs underfoot, trophies of arms and antlers on the wall, piles of hot-house flowers and palms in every corner, while the range of mail-clad figures that had skulked rusty and cobwebbed in their dark niches, now stood forth bravely, burnished and begilt, one mailed hand grasping sword or lance, the other holding aloft a torch blazing cheerily.

We ascended the staircase in admiring silence. It ended in a vast saloon or ante-chamber, from which the drawing-room opened at one end and the picture-gallery at the other.

It was sparsely furnished with hangings and divans of yellow satin, and some handsome marquetric cabinets containing rare china. Portraits of the de Beauvoirs had overflowed from the picture galleries on to its walls, and before one of them I saw a little white figure standing in rapt attention.

It was Miss Morel, looking more than ever like a frail little white moth, as she flitted towards us in her gauzy dress with a subdued sheen of satin and sparkle of diamonds about her.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you," she cried in her musical, half-hushed little voice. "That is, if you will excuse the mistake which I see has been made in your invitation. They had all to be rewritten at the last moment. My godfather could not be here in time. I was in such a hurry to send off yours that I have been afraid since that it went before the correction was made. Will you forgive me?"

We made the necessary polite assurances, and she went on, half-eager, half-shy. "I am so glad to have you all to myself for a little. No one knows you are here but me. Will you come and see the conservatories?" She took my wife's hand in childish fashion, and led her through one of the French windows into a sort of wide glass passage, full of exotics, ending in a great palace of flowers that had been niched into an angle of the inner court or tilt-yard.

"Do you know where you are?" she asked. "The old refectory is under us. Mother must have her flowers; they are her one great pleasure, but we have spoilt the place as little as we could. Everything can be cleared away without leaving a trace."

I wondered why she should say this, and at her tone of apology, but Nellie understood her better.

"I think your conservatories harmonise admirably with the rest of the building. You see, the great old pile has been growing by additions in every generation, and a nineteenth century de Beauvoir would have had as much right to make himself at home in it as a fifteenth century one had to the great hall, or the de Beauvoir who served under Marlborough to your Queen Anne drawing-room."

She looked pleased, and when we had made the round of the

orchids and the mighty chrysanthemums, brought us to her favourite seat, in a nook at the far end, under some spreading palms. Below us lay the wide expanse of the tilt-yard, still in shadow, and just opposite the dark mass of the ruined chapel. Through one great fragment, pierced by an exquisitely-proportioned and still perfect archway, we could see the interior, with its splintered columns and moss-grown monuments.

"The moon will be high enough presently to light the chancel," Miss Morel whispered. "Is it not all sad? I sit here and dream of restoring it—if I had but the right. I have made out the inscriptions on some of the tombs: they are all dead-and-gone de Beauvoirs. Sir Ralph said we might turn it into a good billiard-room! Did he mean to insult us? Does he think that because we are not noble we have no sense of decency?"

"I should imagine that Sir Ralph spoke in pure good faith. The memories of his forefathers never appealed to him very powerfully."

"Ah! is that possible?" she cried excitedly. "Such a history! Such a past! Why, it should be almost a religion to the descendants. It must be to the worthy ones. If you knew what a miserable interloper I feel here! Our money has given us the advantage over them in their necessity —"

This was too great nonsense for even Nellie to stand.

"My dear, it was the gaming-table and the turf that brought the de Beauvoirs of this generation into their difficulties. It was uncommonly lucky that they had your money to fall back upon."

I took up the word. "The de Beauvoirs of old won their position by doing their duty bravely to their king and country. The de Beauvoirs of to-day have lost it by forgetting they owe duty to anyone. Think of your tenants, for instance, and the blessing it will be to them that such a man as your father should be put in the place of that profligate spendthrift, Sir Ralph."

It was a new idea to her. Her face brightened. I went on:

"The Vicar looks ten years younger since someone has come to take half the burden of the parish wretchedness off his shoulders. Instead of cherishing a romantic regard for your predecessors' memory, Miss Morel, the best thing you can do is to turn to and try to efface the mischief and misery they have caused here. A better work than even restoring the chapel."

Her eyes had looked earnestly into mine. Now they wavered, and a sort of cloud gathered over her face. "I am wanted; I must not stay here," she whispered; and even while she spoke she rose and walked away hurriedly. We followed her into the drawing-room, where some of the guests staying in the house had already assembled.

Mrs. Morel, a comely, grey-haired lady, magnificently dressed, welcomed us warmly. "I am so glad you have been making friends with Veronica. She is so shy, I cannot get her to be sociable with anyone except Countess Clara and some of the old women in the village."

Miss Morel had left us and gone to the other end of the long room, where a lady with lovely fair hair and a ruby velvet gown was sitting in a low chair near the fire, surrounded by nearly all the gentlemen of the party. Miss Morel stood before her like a little school-girl called up for a lesson.

"Yes, that is Countess Clara," Mrs. Morel said, following the direction of my eyes. "I never call her anything else, because they all laugh so when I try to pronounce her other name. She is Austrian or Hungarian, or something of the sort. When we went to Ischl last summer, while this place was being made habitable, Veronica took a most extraordinary fancy to her, followed her about like a little dog, and wouldn't be happy till we invited her here. I'll introduce her presently. You'll like her."

Here Mr. Morel came up, a bright-eyed, grey-haired man, with a pointed beard and rather distinguished air. He briefly made us welcome, and held out a note to his wife.

"What is it, dear? I haven't my glasses," she said. "From the Twysden-Browns? An answer at last!"

"A refusal; at the last minute, and with no excuse," he replied grimly.

I knew the family in question, and made no doubt they were merely passing on to the Morels some of the slights and snubs which Sir Ralph was wont freely to bestow on them.

"Well, it's their loss," said Mrs. Morel cheerfully and forgivingly. "And it's all for the best. The Bishop has brought his chaplain, and we should have been rather crowded."

Then guest after guest was announced in quick succession, including, as Nellie observed, with a spiteful joy, people whom the Twysden-Browns would have given half a year's income to be friendly with.

I found myself placed at dinner between the vacant chair that should have held Mrs. Twysden-Brown and a handsome, speechless lady with a fine appetite, who left me at leisure to look about me and contrast the splendours of my present entertainment with the squalid repast of cold, broken meat that was set before me after a night's attendance on Sir Ralph in the clutches of delirium tremens, the only meal I had ever partaken of under the de Beauvoirs' roof.

Miss Morel sat directly opposite me, looking very bright and pretty. Her health was duly proposed by her godfather, a foreign nobleman with a red ribbon in his button-hole, and her neighbour, the Bishop, replied for her with much courtly clerical gallantry. She was laughing and prompting him, when I saw her stop suddenly. Her lips apart, her eyes wavering, and the same cloudy look that I had seen before gathering over her face. Her eyes passed over me without seeing me, and then fixed themselves on the vacant chair beside me, dilating as if with horror. Her hands clutched the edge of the table, her breath seemed to fail. Would she faint or shriek? The Bishop's witticisms were convulsing the table; his portly form screened her

from observation. No one saw her but I. What could it be? I fixed my eyes on hers, as if I could read the reflection in her face. She must, she *should* withdraw her gaze and meet mine. I willed it desperately, imperiously. A mist gathered round us, the room, the brilliant lights and flowers, the laughing faces, all disappeared, everything but Miss Morel's strained, horror-struck dark eyes. Slowly, reluctantly, they flickered aside from the point on which they were fixed—they turned and met mine. I drew a long breath of relief. Lights, flowers, faces righted themselves; the butler at my elbow was proffering some unknown vintage, and Miss Morel, rather pale, but smiling, was leaning back in her chair, softly swaying her plummy fan as the Bishop reseated himself.

It was a curious half-minute's experience. I had no time left for wonderment, however. As the ladies rose and left us, a note was brought to me; I groaned as I recognised it. Did I ever dine out or was I ever called in to an urgent case without one of old Mrs. Wilkin-son's bad attacks coming on? They would kill her eventually, I knew; and she had been a good friend to me; so I was bound to go, and turned out into the night resignedly. As I expected, it proved merely a fit of nerves this time, which subsided as soon as I was found to be within call, and I made such good speed back to the castle that I arrived with the last detachment of guests pouring in for the At Home.

The band in the picture gallery was playing the concluding bars of the second dance of the programme, and a celebrated "Society Clown" was about to commence his entertainment in the library, whither the company was flocking as I ascended the staircase.

The music seemed to break off confusedly as I gained the landing; there was a rush of footsteps, a woman's scream, a fall. I forced my way in the direction and found Mrs. Morel in the doorway of the picture gallery on her knees beside her daughter, who lay white and insensible in my wife's arms, while her partner, a tall young man with an eye-glass, stood near looking wholly disconcerted and uncomfortable.

"She's dead! she's dead! Oh, fetch Sir Humphrey, someone," Mrs. Morel was beginning to shriek; but Nellie, who has always her wits about her, stopped her. "She's all right, she *really* is; don't frighten Mr. Morel for nothing." She put the girl into my arms and picked up the poor lady with scant ceremony.

"Just go first and show the way to Miss Morel's room; and, Sir Edward, please start the dancing again."

Off went the youth readily, and Nellie, who had been dexterously blocking the doorway and preventing the egress of any of the spectators, begged them to go on dancing. "Miss Morel was all right and in the doctor's hands."

I had fortunately not far to follow poor Mrs. Morel's faltering footsteps. The room was close at hand. I placed my burden on a

couch and commenced to throw open the windows, directing Mrs. Morel to unloose the bodice of her dress and send for restoratives.

"Can I do anything to help?" asked a pleasant voice at the door. It was Countess Clara, and I welcomed the sight of her strong, capable face.

"Pegging your pardon, putt that iss my place, yess, indeed! Miss Morel's own nurse, sir, Gwen Williams."

Countess Clara stood aside good-humouredly and let a little figure in black satin with a stupendous cap bustle past her, then, with a smile and nod, retreated.

Mrs. Williams pushed Mrs. Morel's fumbling fingers aside without ceremony and quickly unlaced the satin bodice with many a muttered exclamation. She ordered the good lady off despotically to fetch a certain bottle from the medicine chest, and when she was safely out of the way, looked sharply up at me with her beady black eyes. "What will it be, doctor?"

The truth blurted from my lips, "Upon my soul I cannot say."

It was not an ordinary faint, still less an hysteric sham. The pulse beat strong and regular in the slender white wrist, the breath came as in a deep sleep. Her brow was knit and her teeth set, the face was that of one beholding some terrible vision, and a short shuddering sigh escaped her lips.

None of Mrs. Williams's efforts had roused her. I wished with all my heart Sir Humphrey had been summoned, and proposed to go for him.

"No, no!" the old woman cried energetically. "You are no wiser than he, but you are honest and civil, and maybe you will listen to old Gwen; you are not so grand."

"What do you know about it? Has it happened before?"

"Never in all her life till we came to this unlucky place. It's killing her, Doctor, dear—yes, indeed!" The little woman indulged in an awful grimace to stop her falling tears, and with a sob and a sniff continued: "Just the brightest, merriest little child she was, white and whisht, but never sick till now."

"What do you say it is, then?" I asked with becoming humility, relieved to see the drawn features commence to relax, and a flicker of the eyelids.

"Hush! She's been *overlooked*—though dear knows how or when. I have searched to find a mark on her beautiful white skin, and I've combed her hair over and over lest it shall be the nine knots that they have made in it—or the dried frog's foot sewn into her skirts—or they have given it to her in her first drink of milk in the morning——"

"It? What?" But she only shook her head violently as the door opened and Mrs. Morel re-entered. Simultaneously her daughter sighed once or twice and unclosed her pretty dark eyes, drawing her hand across them like an awakened child.

"Why, Mammie, where am I? What has happened? Did you think I had fainted? I was only giddy. It was Lord Edward's waltzing; he goes round and round like a humming-top."

She looked quite bright and alert, and turned briskly to Mrs. Williams to have her dress adjusted. She had not noticed me, so putting my finger on my lips with a meaning look at Mrs. Morel, I slipped from the room.

I met Sir Humphrey on the staircase, told him just as much as I thought fit, and left the case in his hands.

I saw nothing more of Castle Beauvoir for some weeks after. My time was too fully taken up by my work. Poor old Mrs. Wilkinson died in real earnest at last, and it was a sickly season amongst my parish patients. Other business was on my hands as well. There were local authorities to be stirred up to their duties, sanitary acts to be put in force, tumble-down cottages to be made wind and water-proof before winter set in more sharply, typhoid nests to be routed out, unwholesome ponds drained and ditches cleaned; the neglect of three generations to be repaired on the de Beauvoir estate, a task that no one but Mr. Morel with his inexhaustible energy and ample resources could have undertaken light-heartedly.

The amount of work he got through was prodigious, and when the better sort amongst his tenants and neighbours began to understand and co-operate with him, the Vicar and I felt that there was indeed a good time coming for Shotacre at last.

Nellie paid the necessary visit of ceremony at the castle, and reported that all the guests had left. Miss Morel did not appear, and Mrs. Morel seemed low-spirited, could talk of nothing but her daughter's failing health, and her want of confidence in Sir Humphrey, who declined to pay any attention to her account of Miss Morel's fainting-fits.

"Miss Morel's fainting-fits." They had happened again, then. I wished indeed that I had time and opportunity to observe them for my own satisfaction. I was haunted by a certain resemblance between her and a girl whom I had once seen in a mesmeric trance. It was in my young days at Cambridge, long before Hypnotism had been elevated to the dignity of a subject of scientific discussion. We called it Electro-Biology, and went to the séances of a foreign lady-professor for fun, after which we practised on one another by way of a joke till the fashion died out. Luckily I had sense enough even then to perceive the mischief I might do by playing with such an edged-tool, and solemnly pledged myself to myself that nothing but the direst need should make me employ the mesmeric power of which I found myself possessed.

I had kept faith with myself loyally hitherto, and the gift had lain idle, except for the dispelling of some old woman's tic-doloureux, or to relieve the Vicar's bad attacks of insomnia, and the busy life I

led in this out-of-the-way region prevented my ever taking up the subject as a serious study.

I thought of Gwen Williams, and wondered if the theory I was unconsciously forming were one whit more irrational than hers.

"Overlooked"—"Hypnotised"—which for choice? "I must confer with my fellow-scientist," I declared to myself, but on inquiry I found she had gone away with Mrs. and Miss Morel, and the next week a series of alarming circumstances effectually diverted my attention. The first shock came from the Vicar.

"Have you heard that Mr. Morel has withdrawn his candidature for the County Council?" he asked with a disturbed face.

"No. Why? The very man we want there."

He nodded gravely. "And the works at the quarry are to be stopped next month." I was horribly disconcerted by this change of plan, but possessed my soul in patience.

Next day it was Dr. Grimshaw who stopped me to shake hands, showing all his ugly yellow old teeth in a spiteful grin.

"So you are to lose your good friend up at the castle, eh? Look here." He hauled out a paper giving a report that a certain semi-official post in Egypt had been offered to and accepted by Mr. Gustavus Morel, well-known in financial circles —

"I don't believe it," I said contemptuously, and left him cackling maliciously.

Mrs. Twysden-Brown was the last and worst. She made her big carriage draw up in a muddy lane to greet Nellie, who was riding with me, and I saw by her face she was going to be disagreeable.

"I couldn't help stopping you, dear. I felt I *must* have someone to share the good news with! *Aren't* you delighted? Not heard? *Think* of having the *dear* de Beauvoirs back again! Oh, I know it's true. Mr. Twysden-Brown had it from Sir Ralph himself; I read the letter. We are not to keep it a secret. *What* a welcome home he will have!"

"It's the worst piece of news Shotacre has heard for many a day, and I'm sincerely sorry to hear it," spoke out Nellie—bless her; and disposed of Mrs. Twysden-Brown with a curt adieu. We rode homewards dejectedly through the evening gloom, till Nellie drew rein at the cross-cut to the castle.

"Charlie, you'll be wretched till you know the truth. Ride up there and find out." I took her advice.

I found Mr. Morel in his library before a table covered with maps, plans, specifications, photographs of buildings, etc. He was not looking at any one of them. He sat, staring into vacancy, his head resting on his hands, in the blackest of brown studies, till I got within range of his lamp, when he started and greeted me cordially.

I was in no mood to approach the subject of which my mind was full diplomatically, even if that were ever possible in dealings with

Mr. Morel, and in five minutes had blurted out my news and my fears.

He sighed heavily before he answered. "News flies fast here. I was coming to tell you all this to-morrow myself."

I dropped back in my chair with an actual physical pain at my heart, such as I had never heard of or believed possible in like circumstances.

"Castle Beauvoir has been in the market for the last week. I was assured on all sides that there was no possible chance of a tenant being found, but this morning came Sir Ralph's offer. I wonder if I am committing a great piece of iniquity in allowing that scamp to return to his old position? His misdeeds and those of his father and grandfather are so inextricably mixed that it is impossible to apportion the due share to each. Adversity may have taught him something. I intend that he shall be tightly bound to the engagements I have entered into with his tenants, and I will leave all in order that you and the Vicar shall not be stopped in any of your schemes of usefulness ——" he broke off at the sight of my face.

"Sir Ralph de Beauvoir back amongst us!" I groaned in despair.

"He is older and steadier now, and really writes with much proper feeling about his old home." I shook my head uncheered. "Besides, money sometimes brings its own virtues with it. He may die a saint and a miser, who knows?"

"Money? Whose? How has he come by it?"

"How he is going to raise the purchase money is more than I can tell you, but the property he must and will have at any cost. It is an indispensable condition of his marriage with an American millionairess. She hesitates between him and the penniless younger son of a marquis. The feudal castle will turn the scale. She is descended herself from one of the oldest families in the pork line in Chicago, and is naturally prejudiced in favour of ancient lineage—the Marquis is so very new."

He was talking with forced jocularity, but gave up the effort. "Conyers, I'm grieved—grieved from the bottom of my heart to do this; but if you knew what I have gone through in the last month you'd pity me. It's to save my girl's life or reason I'm doing it. Heaven grant it's not too late!"

What could he mean?

"It was the fancy she took to this accursed place that made me buy it, nearly a year ago," he began, after a short silence. "She was keen to settle down in the country, in a home of our very own; she wanted to make friends with everyone, and to play the Lady Bountiful in the village, and have some duties in life, she said—my good little girl! I liked the thought. Now that I have given up business, I indulged in dreams of training my daughter to administer the wealth that shall be hers nobly and wisely. We were happy here—so happy when we first came, planning restorations and changes,

which we left to be carried out while we went abroad for a few months. She counted the days to our home-coming—and so did I. Then—from the day she first set foot in the place, she suddenly changed. She grew at first only listless and dull, moped in the picture gallery, or wandered about the old chapel all day, and seemed to avoid meeting new people. Then her dislike to the place grew active; she told me passionately that it was killing her; she begged me to take her away at once, as far as possible. That was just after her birthday. Sir Humphrey Driver came down—talked of hysteria-monomania—referred me to a specialist. I had him down here. He examined her, and kept her under constant observation for some time, and says she is as sane as I am. But she is dying—my little Vera is slipping away from me,” he ended with a sob.

“Have you tried change?”

“She went with her mother and her old nurse to a place that was recommended, but she grew so much worse there that we brought her home yesterday. I *must* make an end of it. If I lose her, what have I left? Maybe she is right when she says the curse on the de Beauvoirs will cling to us while we hold their lands.”

“Fudge!” I said, but only in my inmost soul.

“Come and see her,” he said, starting up. “You are a favourite of hers. Nurse Gwen was urgent that I should consult you, but with Sir Humphrey —”

I gave a nod of comprehension. “Mrs. Williams has her own theory of Miss Morel’s delicacy.”

He looked annoyed. “Absurd old creature! I had to be very angry with her—she almost insulted one of our guests in her crazy fits.”

“Perhaps what I am going to suggest may seem to you as crazy,” I began; and, once started, gave Mr. Morel the benefit of my wild imaginings. He was too polite to give a sign of disbelief, but he gave none of assent either. He heard me to the end, and then led the way to the drawing-room.

We came upon a pretty group in the firelight. Mrs. Morel sat on a low chair, her daughter leaning against her knee. Vera had got possession of her mother’s hand and was caressing it as she kept up a soft little murmur of talk. Mrs. Morel’s comely face had grown careworn, and her lips twitched nervously as she spoke. Vera sprang up to meet us. Such a wasted little hand she placed in mine! Mr. Morel demanded tea, and she went off to pour it out for us. She wore a loose sort of dress, “a tea-gown of eau-de-nil satin, hand embroidered in jet and silver, straight from Vienna” (interpolated by Nellie), which hid her figure but made her face look almost corpse-like in hue, and her great eyes shone like the jet stars on her gown—an altogether weird effect. While I talked, she moved to and fro uneasily, and finally disappeared into the conservatory; I could catch the glint of her gown as she passed out into the moonshine at the far end.

Mr. Morel was called away by a servant with a note requiring answering, and I was left to talk to his wife. She began at once on her grief at leaving and seeking another home. Even Mr. Morel's wealth would not stand keeping up another such establishment unless he got rid of this one—and that was what Vera insisted on. Nothing less would satisfy her.

I spoke out energetically. I enlarged upon Mr. Morel's work, described the miserable, God-forgotten state of the place before his coming, the want, vice, ignorance, that had thriven like evil weeds fostered by the neglect and wrong-doing of generations. "The de Beauvoirs were a curse to the land, their property a plague-spot on the face of the earth——"

I broke off suddenly, for Vera was standing behind me ; she had drawn near unnoticed while I spoke more strongly and at length than I knew. Too strongly for poor Mrs. Morel's nerves. She gave a sob or two, then jumped up with her handkerchief at her eyes, and made for the door. Veronica ran to her with outstretched arms, but her mother made a gesture of avoidance and rushed from the room, leaving the girl standing there, a picture of dumb, bewildered misery.

"What am I doing?" she demanded of me with the woful, wistful look that made me think I knew not why of "a spirit in prison."

Mr. Morel entered. He must have met his wife, I think, for he asked no explanation, but walked up to his daughter, looking eagerly at her. "What is it, Vera? Tell Dr. Conyers."

Again the look, as of a dumb animal in cruel pain. She tried to speak, but choked, stopped, and shook her head. "I cannot. If I only could——" I fancied I heard. Then she suddenly seized my arm. "Help me. Make me tell you," she cried, in an odd, strangled voice.

I looked inquiringly at Mr. Morel.

"Try what you like, in Heaven's name," he answered.

I told her what I wished to do, and she assented dully. Never, in spite of her willingness, have I had a more difficult subject to deal with. It was as if I were wrestling with some powerful counter-influence external to the girl that must be overcome before I could bend her will to mine. I was faint and exhausted before she yielded, at last, and sank back in slumber in her chair.

Mr. Morel looked on, half-angry, half-curious. "Ask her why she will not live here?"

"They will not let me. We have no right here. They will not rest till we go.

"Who?"

"They—the faces that I see everywhere. They hunt me night and day. They mean to hunt me into my grave. If I live to take possession they will kill me. Save me! Take me away while there is time. Give it back! Give it back."

She struggled fiercely, her face grew distorted with terror, a thin line of foam appeared on her lips. I passed my hand over her

forehead. "They are gone. Do you hear me. They are gone," I said, authoritatively.

Her features became calm; she smiled, relieved. "They are gone."

"You dreamt them?"

"I dreamt them."

"When did you dream them first?"

"On my birthday. There was an empty place at the table. When I looked I saw him there. The one with the dark brows and wicked look. He leant on the table and looked up and down, blighting you all with his burning eyes."

"And the next?"

"When I was dancing I saw him standing in the doorway, and as I passed, he stretched out a cold hand and caught my shoulder—A—h—h!"

"They are only dreams, remember. After that?"

"They come so fast I can hardly tell you. They look out at me from amongst the trees in the wood; they peep round the pillars of the church. They stare and gibber in at the windows from the dusk outside. I feel cold breath on my neck, and I turn, and two eyes glare into mine. I know what they all say though I cannot tell the words."

"Why could you not tell all this sooner?"

"I was prevented."

"By whom?"

Again the struggle and the slight convulsion passing over her face. I was nervous; I dared not prolong the experiment.

"You will never see them more. There, I have sent them away. Now I have made you forget them." She sat perfectly quiet, smiling contentedly till I roused her.

"Have I been asleep in my chair while you two were talking?" she asked, with a laugh, rubbing her eyes with the pretty, childish gesture that I remembered.

I gave Mr. Morel a hint not to allow his wife to refer to the vexed question, prescribed early hours and plenty of outdoor exercise for my patient, and promised to call first thing in the morning.

"What has been the gain of all this?" Mr. Morel asked, gloomily, following me to the door. "We have discovered that the poor child has been tormented by hallucinations. Have you power sufficient to hold them at bay; and what is the extent and duration of that power?"

"Will you trust my honour and loyalty, and leave me to answer your questions by and by," I pleaded, for I was overdone and over-excited. I felt as if I had gone through some violent physical struggle. My horse had his wits about him, and brought me home with no assistance from me, and I stumbled blindly into my surgery, and dropping into a chair, fell into a heavy slumber.

I was awakened by a low tapping at the outside door. All the household were asleep, fancying that I had been called out again to some case, so I opened the door softly and found an odd little figure waiting on the step. Gwen Williams, with a big hood pinned over her cap, and a great cloak.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked anxiously. "Is Miss Morel ill?"

"Sleeping like an angel; that is why I left her. Tell me—what have you been doing to her, Doctor, *bach*?"

"What has brought you here?"

She sat down on a stool at the opposite side of my fire and nodded mysteriously. "I was right, was I not, eh? Overlooked she wass; and"—very mysteriously—"I know who did it."

She chuckled with delight at my look of surprise, nodded and winked cunningly. Then she folded her arms and leaned forward till the peak of her hood nearly touched my face.

"The day they were leaving us—all the ladies and gentlemen—I said, 'I will see was it one of you'; and I—listen, Doctor—I sprinkled the doorstep with a handful of blessed salt that I had from a wise woman in my own country, eh?"

I was too prudent to stop to make inquiries; I only nodded.

"They all passed over it when they said good-bye—all but her. She turned back—yes, indeed—and she went again; and then she turned back again, and then she sneezed, and I knew I had her!" Her face fell. "But the master was angry when I spoke, and wouldn't listen, and he let her go; but"—with another nod of triumph—"it was not by *that* door she went after all—no, indeed!"

"And who was she?"

"Her with the yellow hair—Countess Clara."

I was startled. For the second time the old woman's wits and mine had jumped to the same conclusion, on equally irrational grounds. I could get no further reason out of Gwen than the testimony of the blessed salt—whatever that might be; and my own idea was based only on Mrs. Morel's mention of her daughter's singular fancy for the woman, and a vague recollection of her manner on the one occasion when I saw them together.

Gwen hurried back to her post, leaving me to a hag-ridden night.

I was up at the castle next morning as early as I reasonably could appear. Mr. Morel was walking on the terrace with his cigar, Vera beside him. She came smiling up to me and greeted me with a little jest. I was pleased to see how devoid of consciousness her manner was. Mr. Morel I fancied was a trifle cool. I think he resented last night's experiment.

I went home and consulted Nellie. She has a way of knowing exactly what I want doing without troubling her head about my reasons.

"Of course, dear, you cannot keep on calling incessantly, especially as Mrs. Morel must not be made uneasy. I can look after Miss

Morel to-day. I promised to let her know when the Sunday-school prizes were to be given. If I go this morning they will keep me to luncheon, and I can stay till dusk and you can call to fetch me."

There is a certain eminent French savant with whom I once had occasion to correspond. He has of late years devoted himself to the study of the phenomena of Hypnotism. I decided on consulting him. Nellie reappeared before I had finished my letter that afternoon.

"They want us to dine there. The Vicar and Mrs. Boyd are coming. I've come down to dress and bring you back with me."

On our way there, Nellie told me that she had made exhaustive inquiries about Countess Clara. "I know all about her except her surname. It begins with S—z—c—h— and ends in ska, but that's as much as anybody knows. She's a genuine Countess, half English, visits in the best society, and was quite properly introduced to the Morels. Here's her address; I've written it down; I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I believe she is quite respectable."

Mrs. Morel seemed in excellent spirits and talked Christmas trees, magic-lantern entertainments and other village dissipation with the Vicar's wife all dinner-time, Vera joining in readily. The Vicar left us directly after dinner, leaving Mr. Morel and me to talk, across the walnuts and the wine.

"Here's something that may interest you," said Mr. Morel, pulling out a letter. "This is from the fair American, the future *châtelaine*. She is, above all, practical, and insists on coming to inspect the place for herself and assuring herself of my willingness to sell. Plans for the complete restoration on a magnificent scale are to be immediately prepared."

"And the rest of the property —?"

"We must trust to philanthropy being so much the fashion. I thought she looked good-natured when I saw her once, but as hard and sharp as nails. The future of Shotacre will rest with her, not with Sir Ralph, if that is any comfort to you."

"It isn't."

"Conyers, I know you blame me for giving in, but what can I do? Can you engage to keep Veronica's mind for ever clear of those wretched hallucinations that make the place terrible to her. Your experiment last night was curious, but leads to nothing."

"I beg your pardon. It has revealed the existence of a sinister influence over Miss Morel's mind. Give me the chance of discovering it and destroying it. That is all I ask."

I told him of my letter to Dr. Quinet. He listened indifferently, but promised to make no further arrangements for the sale till the reply should come. The sudden opening of the door cut his sentence short. It was Nellie who entered, pale and scared.

"Oh, Charles! Mr. Morel! What is to be done? She's gone."

"Gone—who? Miss Morel? Where? When?" We sprang up in alarm and bewilderment.

"We were sitting together in the conservatory, when she just got up and walked away without a word to me. I waited some time and then went to look for her. A maid says she saw her go out a quarter of an hour ago. Nurse Williams and I have looked everywhere. Her fur cloak is gone and her hat, but no gloves, and in those thin little shoes——"

"But why? Where should she go?" Mr. Morel demanded.

"Oh, how like a man!" cried Nellie in an agony of impatience. "Can't you form your theory while you are looking for her. Isn't it enough that she has gone—gone out into this winter night shoeless and gloveless—all alone and with a purse full of money——"

"Ring the bell!" Mr. Morel cried to me. "We must send the servants——"

"Stop!" cried Nellie, rising to the occasion, as usual. "You will frighten Mrs. Morel to death. She knows nothing. She and Mrs. Boyd are fast asleep over the drawing-room fire. They think we are in the billiard-room. Mrs. Williams has gone with a man to search the village and bring her back quietly if she is there. If she is not she must have taken the London road. Our dog-cart is at the door, and you can overtake her. I'll keep Mrs. Morel quiet. Perhaps she need never know."

We were off in five minutes, leaving Nellie to do her best. We had no time to speak as we drove along behind my smart little mare, looking sharply out at either side of the road. A thick, soaking mist hung over the land, which the moon was trying in vain to disperse. Once past the hedges and fences and scattered clumps of trees around the village the great South road stretched out before us, a white ribbon between flat spreading common land, strewn sparsely with tufts of gorse and heather. We drove for a mile or two, and then stopped and looked around. Right or left all was bare and lonely, with no covert for anything larger than a rabbit. "We should have passed her before this if we had been on the right road," I said; "let us try back." A few yards behind us another road branched off leading to the next village. Along it a stout farmer of my acquaintance came clumping heavily on his grey cob. I hailed him and questioned him. "No. He'd met nobody, unless maybe the mail-cart going to catch the London train." I thanked him, gave the mare a touch with the whip, and drove fast along the lane. His words brought into my mind a sudden recollection of a foot-path I had noticed, a short cut to the station from which the local train caught up the London mail at the junction.

"Why are we going this way?" demanded Mr. Morel. "Why should she be——"

But we had reached the foot-path. I threw him the reins, and was over the stile and half-way across the first field before he had ended

his question. Another stile and another field, I ran and ran. Then a gate, left open in defiance of the notice above it, and in the field beyond a girl's figure.

She was walking slowly but steadily on. A bramble swaying from the hedge caught her skirt. She made no attempt to disengage herself. The dress tore away, but she never paused. I overtook her, treading heavily and whistling that she might not be startled; she never looked nor made way for me. "Miss Morel," I said, for now I was sure of her. She gave no sign of hearing, but walked on with the stony abstraction of a somnambulist. I caught her in my arms and held her tight. I commanded her with all the force of my will to obey me. She *must* stop and listen to me. She struggled blindly, then suddenly gave way, and fell senseless on my shoulder.

I could not rouse her. I shouted to Mr. Morel, and at last he came, and we carried her between us to the dog-cart, and I managed to support her while he drove home. Before we reached it her consciousness had returned, but I forbade her to speak till we had reached the castle, and I had given her safely into Gwen's faithful care.

Nellie had stood bravely at her post, coining I don't know how many innocent fictions, when Mrs. Morel became aware that her daughter was missing. She had actually not taken alarm when we re-entered the drawing-room.

Mr. Morel was beginning to thank me, but I stopped him.

"Your daughter is not safe yet. In Heaven's name let me try the one chance I see. It is a desperate one."

"What can I do?"

"Give me a fresh horse and twenty pounds—the bank is closed. I am going to do what your daughter was about to do when I stopped her. I can catch the night mail to London at the junction, and cross by the tidal train to-morrow for Paris."

The following evening, at the same hour, I was awaiting an interview with Countess Clara. I had bribed my way into her house, despite protestations and assurances that she could not receive me. I was in a small library, or boudoir, sounds of music and voices in conversation filtering in to me through a half-closed door. Rapid travelling had given my courage small time to cool, but apprehensions crowded on me thick and fast now. The madness of my errand was very plain to me, but I refused to dwell upon it. I looked at the books around me, the choice collections of prints and photographs, the costly bits of china and enamel—all the surroundings of a woman of culture and refinement. A small ivory shrine stood on the writing-table. I touched it idly, and it opened. Inside was a miniature—Sir Ralph de Beauvoir! I could not mistake him. The haggard face, with the self-indulgent mouth and drooping, cynical eyes. My fast-chilling courage flamed up again to furnace heat, and I shook my fist at him in defiance, and shut him up again. Then the door softly opened, and I turned to face Countess Clara.

Words cannot describe the polite, astonished contempt with which she regarded my travel-stained, dusty self. She spoke civilly, but she meant to make me uncomfortable, and succeeded.

She waited for me to speak, not asking me to be seated or giving me the slightest encouragement.

"I have come here from your friend, Mr. Morel," I began. "You have heard that he is about to sell Castle Beauvoir?"

I detected a flash of triumph in her eyes, but she simply raised her fine eyebrows and waited further enlightenment.

"You know why he does so?"

"I believe his daughter's health was not good there—or she fancied so. A castle more or less is not much to him," she said carelessly.

"It means a good deal to him, as it happens, if this one has cost his daughter her life or her reason."

"Pardon me. How am I concerned in this?"

"You can explain that best yourself, Countess. In my attendance on Miss Morel I have discovered that she has fallen under some powerful influence—malign influence, I would say. Seek the influence. I have done so. Yours. Next, seek the motive. That is what I am here for."

She stepped backwards to the door by which she had entered, opened it, and spoke rapidly to someone within. There followed a titter and sundry exclamations. I gathered that she pronounced me to be either mad or drunk, and they were to stand by to assist her. It exasperated but did not disconcert me. Then she came up to me and spoke soothingly. "You are overtired with your journey, dear Dr. Conyers, otherwise I should have begged you to join our party; but come and breakfast with me to-morrow and you shall put me to the question as much as you will. For the present, adieu."

"I shall stay here till I get an answer," I replied doggedly; though I felt my false position, and was uneasily conscious of spectators gathering at the half-open door. A merry little black-eyed lady foremost, and two tall gentlemen with eye-glasses behind her.

The Countess gave a tolerant laugh. "Answer! What answer can I give you, Doctor? If I tell you I have no influence over that poor child, will you believe me? No. Then, if I say I have, what can you do? Can you prevent it?"

"I can, but I would rather not."

"You are wise," she sneered. Then with her serene, good-tempered smile: "Miss Morel is my dear friend. You cannot suppose that I should wish harm to the poor little creature?"

"You would not spare her in Sir Ralph's interests. You are playing his game unscrupulously. You knew the only way to drive Mr. Morel to restore the place to him." I was hitting blindly now, my judgment and temper were giving way.

She kept silence, well-contented. From the doorway came a murmur of surprise and admiration. I lost my head entirely.

"What is your object? What good can it do you? Mr. Morel will pay you twice the money to set his daughter free from this bondage. It cannot be for Sir Ralph's own sake? You are not his mother or his sister. He cannot be your lover or husband. You would never play this despicable part just to help him to a rich American wife——"

The chorus at the door rose to shrieks of amazement mingled with a shrill malicious giggle. Countess Clara stood calm and magnificent, but ghastly pale; her eyes piercing me through and through. "A rich American wife!" she repeated. "Tell me who she is, and how you know."

I told her. She listened with fixed attention, unmoved, except for a certain grim whitening and tightening of her lips. When I had done, she turned to the spectators, who now had opened the door wide and came crowding into the room. "And you all? What have you known of this?"

"Not a word! Could one credit such treason! Ah, the coward! the infamous! Sir de Beauvoir had, nevertheless, departed for London that day," one said.

She looked at them with grand scorn. "It amuses you—his perfidy? You shall live to see it punished. Dr. Conyers, I owe you gratitude and reparation. Let us be friends and allies. All the hold I have on Miss Morel ceases within this hour. In return, can you break off the sale of the estate?"

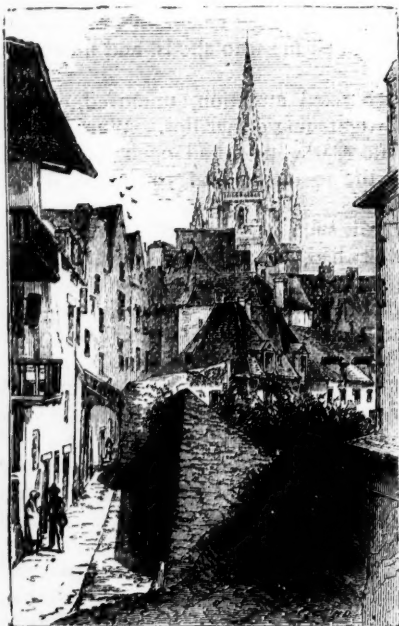
"Madame, I can do more. I can break off the marriage."

She held out her strong white hand to me, and we struck the bargain. She was in deadly earnest. Much as I hated him, for that brief instant my heart was filled with pity for Sir Ralph.

There is little more to tell. The Morels are at Castle Beauvoir still; Vera the life and soul of all the Christmas gaieties for miles round. Mrs. Morel's gratitude for my skilful treatment of her daughter is profuse enough even to satisfy Nellie; and Mr. Morel has put up a new East window in the church, and built a Cottage Hospital as thankofferings. I have never heard what became of Sir Ralph, but the golden girl from Chicago is to marry her Lord Harry at Easter. Gwen Williams declares it was all that pinch of blessed salt—yes, indeed!

THE BRETONS AT HOME.

By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC. ETC.



WE found Quimper a strange mixture of new and old. Once upon a time it must have been very charming and interesting, full of gables and ancient outlines. The rivers, unconfined by stone embankments, ran their courses to the sea in a far more sylvan manner than they do now. Fair faces and bright eyes looked out upon the flowing waters from latticed panes, which have given place to too much that is modern and unromantic. In those days, a lover serenading his mistress beneath the moonbeams would have been a fitting accompaniment to all this charm of Mediæval architecture ; as much so as a Spanish troubadour warbling love-songs beneath the lovely balconies of Seville ;

or an Italian twanging his guitar to his mistress reclining on the cushions of his gondola, whilst gliding over the moonlit waters, past palaces and temples, in the rapture of Love's young dream. But for Quimper the romantic age has passed. Not that for the Bretons it ever existed. One could no more imagine a Breton of these or other days writing sonnets to his mistress's eyebrows, or recalling her from dreamland by the fervour of his love songs, than we could imagine such proceeding on the part of a sturdy Yorkshireman or prosy inhabitant of Cornwall.

But there is still something that is very beautiful and interesting about Quimper. The towns where the hand of the modern barbarian has not become visible are few and far between. You must visit Vitré, Nuremberg, Dantzic, and a few such places, separated from each other by long distances, to lose yourself completely in

the past ; to go back to the days and customs that are no more ; to thoroughly realise the Middle Ages and the race that then ruled the world. They were stronger then than we are to-day. We may have gained in the refinements of life, which have become necessary to existence, but these, when all is said and done, are enervating. It may be that we are greater in science, have reached a higher development ; by-and-by shall be as gods, drawing the lightning from the skies and reading the mysteries of the stars ; but those men and women of the Middle Ages must have possessed a mental and moral vigour which we of to-day know very little about. To them the building of a pyramid would have been an easy matter, had they wished to imitate the Egyptians. There was a self-reliance about them, firm and immovable, and it was a great inheritance.

Quimper of to-day has passed away from all this. Its state of transition is over. What the town is now, it may well be a hundred years hence. Yet hardly so ; for, as I have said, it still possesses exquisite nooks and corners ; some in full evidence, others only to be discovered by seeking : spots too beautiful to last for ever. Age and decay will overtake them ; the hand of man will bring them to the ground ; new buildings, hideous and imposing, will rise up and destroy the last remnant of romance, the last vestige of what we think must have been a dream existence.

When we left the cathedral and the curious old Suisse, and found ourselves under the grey morning skies, we had the world before us : the little world of Quimper. In the corner of the square we espied an old inn, very tumbling-down and picturesque, and we made for it. The courtyard was quaint and curious. Country carts of strange forms reposed under sheds that were delightfully dilapidated. Everything wore a beautifully Mediæval look. The back of the inn was as ancient as the front—and very much more dirty ; but that only added to its antiquity. The windows were out of the perpendicular ; the whole building looked as if a good push would bring it to the ground. In the distance uprose the houses facing the quay, conspicuous amongst them the back windows of our hotel. Between was the sea of grey roofs and gabled outlines, and small gardens, and creepers that twined about and looked very fresh and fair and green. To the left the tall spires of the cathedral pointed upwards, like lace-work against the grey sky. It was a scene full of colouring and beauty.

The interior of the inn was worthy of the exterior. The rooms were low and ancient, the passages numerous and gloomy ; there were all sorts of unexpected, out-of-the-way nooks and corners. But the virtue of cleanliness was not conspicuous : Catherine was right : cleanliness is not an article in the creed of the people of Quimper. They spare the water, that is yet so abundant.

Mine hosts of the inn were very civil, and seemed to take an interest in showing us over the place. They were a curious couple,

capacious and good-humoured. He in time promised to develop into a second Daniel Lambert. His better half, in everything but size, spoke French with a decidedly Quimper patois, and wore a Brittany cap, which was very becoming. For she must once have been pretty, and still possessed the generous comeliness of middle age, which has a distinct charm of its own. Every season has its beauty.

"The quality do not descend here," she said; "but I think they would do so if they knew how comfortable we could make them. We have an excellent cuisine; and now and then, when I am my own chef," straightening herself until her head-dress seemed to touch the low oak ceiling, "it is perfection."

"Whilst our wines cannot be equalled," chimed in the landlord, whose dimensions certainly bore witness to Madame's amiability and powers as an artist in the gastronomic world. "But like many great people, we are not appreciated at our full value, and so we for the most part only do *le petit commerce*."

"But of that as much as we like," said Madame. "And after all, it pays well. We are quite contented. Having no children we are not anxious to grow rich."

They certainly might have sat as models of Serenity, or earned the Flitch of Bacon, had Brittany possessed the custom. But its necessity has never arisen. With this phlegmatic and worthy race matrimonial troubles are the exception. Whatever the course of true love, their married lives run smoothly enough. Not altogether because the men are angels (Catherine would have a word to say to that), but because the women are forbearing, with great powers of endurance, and accept indiscretions on the part of their lords as matters to be taken for granted. It is the wiser course, and receives its reward when the end comes; often long before the end.

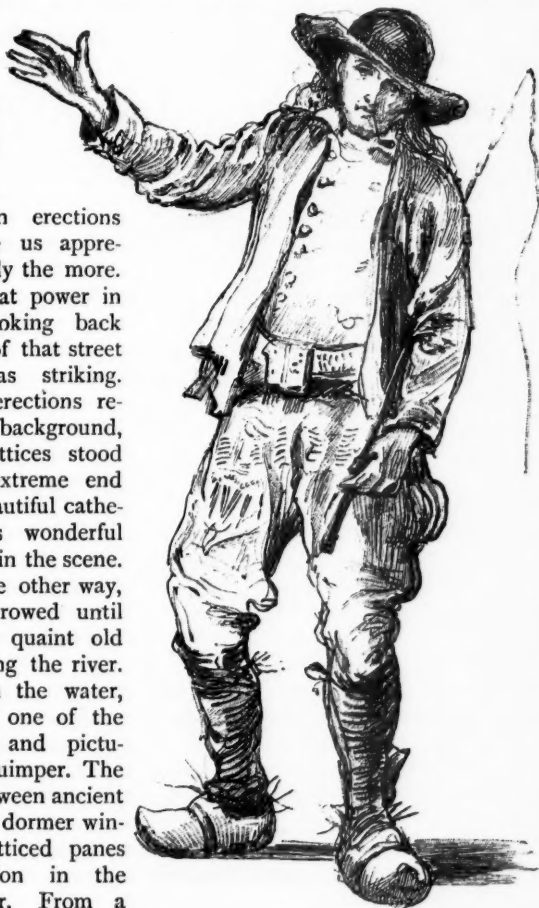
We left the old inn and its worthy couple, and wandered away into the town. The principal street opposite the cathedral still possessed some ancient and gabled houses. But a mania for restoration, painting and decoration has taken possession of the people, who are guilty of sins both of omission and commission. Their interiors are too often neglected; whilst latticed windows and gables that once charmed have been ruined by a wicked expenditure of paint and fancy work. The result is as displeasing as the paint and powder with which an ancient beauty tries to cheat the world into the belief that her long-lost youth is still there.

In Quimper this new face to an old building was a constant source of irritation; and so it came to pass that the town was far more interesting by night than by day. Modern and aggressive houses, with square windows and straight lines supported on either side a house dating back to Mediæval times; days that had gazed upon the world when the world was young, and men and women went about in broad hats and bell-like sleeves and skirts, and

Queen Elizabeth ruffs. Houses that had seen changes of dynasty, empires rise and fall, martyrs going to execution, and witches with the evil eye burnt at the stake, or tied up in a sack and plunged into the river. If the witch sank, poor thing, it was the judgment of Heaven, and if she floated she was clearly a sorceress.

These gabled outlines and latticed pane between unsightly modern erections perhaps made us appreciate them only the more. There is a great power in contrast. Looking back from the end of that street the effect was striking. The modern erections retired into the background, gables and lattices stood out; at the extreme end uprose the beautiful cathedral with its wonderful spires, closing in the scene.

Turning the other way, the street narrowed until we reached a quaint old bridge spanning the river. Looking down the water, the view was one of the most striking and picturesque in all Quimper. The stream ran between ancient houses whose dormer windows and latticed panes found reflection in the running water. From a house on the left uprose an exquisite round turret, that might have been sixteenth century, and might have been earlier, it was difficult to say without a close examination of the masonry; an early Gothic turret with a suspicion of renaissance about the corbel. This, projecting beyond the walls, also found its deep reflection in the clear waters of the Steir. It once formed part of the ancient walls of Quimper, of which few traces are now left.



A BRETON WAGGONER.

Passing down this street—the Rue de Kéréon—on the right, at the end of a narrow thoroughfare, you come to the market-place: on market days a very interesting and animated scene. I think it impressed us more than anything else in the old town. The peasantry were here in full force and in great variety of costume. Some of the Brittany caps and bodices were wonders of construction and marvels of whiteness. Here at least the women took some pride in their dress and personal appearance, and exercised some taste; and so far were the most civilized peasantry we had yet seen. Many of the women selling butter and poultry were no doubt well-to-do farmers' wives, and we were not surprised at their superior appearance both in the matter of dress and jewellery: those thick gold chains and earrings, of which the French of this class are so universally proud.

The ladies of the town, marketing in the ordinary cloaks and bonnets one sees all over the world, were much less interesting objects than the maids who followed their mistresses with well-filled baskets of provisions. It was difficult to move amidst the crowd. Much of the bargaining that went on was in the Breton tongue, which did not seem to lend itself to more speedy and amicable arrangement than any other tongue. The bargaining was as hard and prolonged as it usually is in these Continental market-places; the voices were as harsh and unmusical. But the scene is always a lively one, no matter what the place, and the placid contentment with which a market-woman pockets her diminished price proves that the system is the result of habit rather than avarice. Not everywhere, however, is it enlivened by picturesque costumes.

One morning we went in the market-place, and were surprised at an unusual commotion. There seemed an air of expectation and excitement in the faces of the people. More men than usual were lounging and strolling about, and the centre of the building had been cleared. Three musicians sat on inverted tubs, tuning up a fiddle, a bagpipe, or *biniau*, as they call it, and a flute. The sound was anything but musical, and nothing but a desire to gratify our curiosity prevented us from departing with a quick march. H. C., who, whatever his virtues, does not know God Save the Queen from the Hailstone Chorus, rather admired the combination of instruments and the frightful discord. He declared it to be nothing to the discords of Wagner: that wonderful man whose music was in reality all harmony, until his judgment went astray, and he composed operas that could only come into favour if man's age were to be seven hundred years instead of seventy.

We inquired as to the cause of all this quiet excitement, and found that it was nothing less than a wedding. The happy pair, after being married in church, would come to the market-place with the bridal party, and there, received by friends and acquaintances, would dance themselves into a state of heat and distraction as an introduction to the wedding-dinner that quickly followed.

We had not long to wait. Suddenly the musicians—the piper was blind—struck up a melancholy and monotonous strain, which was no doubt a sort of Breton Wedding March—for the Bretons are sad even in their joyous matters. It was a performance that should have assisted at a man's execution, for he would have rejoiced that life was almost over. We felt inclined to rush down to the Steir, whose waters flowed so near at hand, and plunge beneath them for ever.

In a few minutes the bridal party arrived, arrayed in costume, the happy pair wearing rather more finery than the rest. All were picturesque; for the most part well-made and comely; superior to the ordinary specimen of Breton peasant. The bride and bridegroom were not at all troubled by undue bashfulness. This public exhibition in the market-place is quite a part of the marriage ceremony. They have grown familiar with the idea from childhood upwards by assisting at the weddings of their friends. The Breton temperament, moreover, is not sensitive and highly strung, and the flush of anger is more often seen than the blush of modesty. Truth to say the latter is seldom needed; not often is their modesty shocked; both men and women are well conducted, and modesty can afford to slumber.

It was an interesting sight, this wedding festival; very much so to us, who had never seen anything of the sort. Their ways and manners were curious. They evidently found it impossible to put off a certain apathy of temperament; even in dancing, their movements were sluggish and deliberate. They never grew wild and excited and noisy; there was no laughter and shouting; it needed the inspiring influence of dinner and strong waters to stir up whatever of noisy element reposed within them.

A large ring was formed, and the newly-married couple began the performance by dancing alone, whilst the three musicians on the tubs gradually raised their discord to a wild shriek. The dance was slow and not at all graceful; perhaps the Breton peasant could not be graceful under any circumstances. Sturdy limbs, large hands and feet, a general heaviness of outline are not conducive to that "harmony of movement" which is one of the charms of life.

When the bride and bridegroom had slowly and solemnly swayed and pirouetted once or twice round the ring, another couple entered; and, without ceasing their movement, the bride and groom separated; he went on with the new lady and she with the new gentleman. So it continued until about twenty couples were whirling about like dancing dervishes. The only people who seemed to go really mad with excitement were the musicians, and their instruments performed perfect feats of raving. All the air was full of discord. We wished that the tubs would give way and swallow up all the offending element.

The tubs refused to do anything of the sort, but time came to the rescue. *Tout vient à qui sait attendre.* At a given signal a solemn silence suddenly fell upon all. The dancing ceased, so did the

music. A procession was formed. The musicians headed the party; the bride and bridegroom came next; the rest paired off: and the music recommenced. Thus in a long line they passed through the streets of Quimper to the inn where the wedding dinner had been provided.

Here presently we saw them all assembled in an upper room, feasting with an abundance of good cheer, and evidently very happy. Wine was circulating round the table, beer frothed in many glasses, and something stronger would no doubt be presently forthcoming.

It was a long, low room, with wide windows and small latticed panes: an old room, without carving or adornment, but well suited to the ceremony. There were two long tables and both were filled with guests. The bride headed one table, and the bridegroom sat at her right hand; thus very prettily giving honour to the weaker vessel. The bridegroom's father headed the other table, and his wife sat at his right hand. They had had their youth and their day, and we must suppose that the experience of married life had led the husband to find safety in consigning the wife to the secondary position. The lady looked quite satisfied with her lot. All round the table the stolid Breton expression had relaxed, and fun and laughter were gradually gaining the upper hand. This would go on for some hours. The costumes added greatly to the scene.

The bridegroom caught sight of us, and in no way disconcerted or offended at our intrusion—we had made it as unobtrusive as possible—he rose up with a flushed and laughing face, and, tumbler of wine raised above his head, drank to our health—thus reversing the right order of things. We duly responded, wished them happiness and length of days, and departed.

After this manner most of the weddings take place in Quimper. Those a little higher in life do not assemble in the market and dance in public; but music and feasting, though more privately indulged in, are not absent from the day's ceremonies. In Landerneau, as we have seen, music was once a very public affair, and the widows in their second marriage had, no doubt, more of it than they cared for.

There must have been something infectious in the air that day: for not two hours after we had assisted at this dance in the market-place, H. C. himself received his first offer of marriage. Again it was reversing the order of things, for it was not leap year, but I can only record what happened.

It occurred as follows:

Very near to the market-place we had discovered an amiable photographer—Madame de Kermadec—who had undertaken to develop our plates for us. In the course of conversation she discovered H. C.'s weakness for curiosities and old china. She was herself a lover of the antique, in everything excepting human nature. This immediately established a sort of freemasonry between them

and they became excited and enthusiastic over an old and cracked oriental dragon, that very rudely showed its tongue, and had eyes



BRITTANY PEASANT.

that seemed ready to drop out of its head. This, H. C. declared, constituted its chief beauty.

"But," said Madame presently, "if Monsieur would like to see a

real collection, he should call upon Mdle. Ponpon over the way, the *marchande de chaussures*. She is very charming and amiable, full of sentiment, and would be delighted to show you her treasures."

I felt inclined to remonstrate, but it was only that morning that I had put his umbrella up the chimney; he had soon missed it, and being disconsolate at his loss, I felt that some compensation was due to him. I therefore followed H. C. and the amiable but troublesome photographer with the resigned air of a martyr. I knew that I was in for a *mauvais quart d'heure*, but little dreamed of the delicate negotiation that I should have to carry out. Tact, after all, is a wonderful thing; and nothing but extreme tact averted terrible consequences.

Madame de Kermadec tripped across the road: H. C.'s long strides beside her playing a sort of bass to the treble of her light fantastic toe. She opened the door of the *magasin de chaussures*, and a small bell tinkled; a small screen dividing the front from the back regions was agitated; we heard the sound of a spoonful of soup hastily swallowed, the spoon dropped into a plate, and Mademoiselle Ponpon came forward, all smiles and curtsies. She was evidently refreshing herself with a *bouillon*, though it was rather the hour for tea or coffee. As she only supplied boots and shoes for the gentler portion of humanity, she must have been surprised to find that her visitors were of the perfidious sex.

"Bon-jour, Mademoiselle Ponpon," said our guide, speaking very rapidly. "This gentleman," indicating H. C., "is a passionate admirer of antiquities. I said I was quite sure you would be delighted to show him your collection."

Mademoiselle bowed. "She had never been so honoured. It would delight her to show her few *biblots* to *ces messieurs*. But they would have to take the trouble to mount to the second floor."

Madame declared she must run back to her shop. As she prepared to depart, I heard her whisper to the little *marchande de chaussures*, indicating H. C.:

"Magnificent eyes, *ma chère*! All soul. You who are full of sentiment will appreciate their expression." Then she made us a little bow and tripped back to her own domicile, where she was colouring photographs.

Mademoiselle led the way up a narrow, winding staircase to the second floor, threw open the door of her two salons, bade us welcome, asked us to be seated, and did the honours of her little collection. It was extremely good as far as it went. She had a buffet and *dressoir* of old carved woodwork that was genuine sixteenth century. Her walls were decorated with some rare plates of *majolica* ware, real old Quimper, Oriental and Sèvres. But what she was most proud of was a chair or half-throne, magnificently sculptured, and which took up quite a third of one of the small rooms.

"That chair has a history," said Mademoiselle, sitting down with

a sigh and crossing her hands. "I was not born to my present humble position. I was christened Amatalide Marie Désiré de Belleville Ponpon. My mother was a de Belleville; her father was the Marquis de Belleville. In marrying my father she made a més-alliance. He was only a Ponpon, but he was a rich ironmaster and lived in great style. My great-grandfather was Archbishop of Paris, and that chair was the throne on which he sat when presiding at the councils. Therefore I was born rather to mate with the nobility than to become—what I am."

We murmured a few words of sympathy.

"Alas, yes, it all passed away," said Mademoiselle Ponpon with another deep sigh. "The works failed, my father died almost in embarrassment, my mother soon followed him, heartbroken. I was left with a small fortune, which five years ago was lost in the *Crédit Merveilleux*. I have rich and noble relations—they all turned their backs upon me. And here I am, with a little rente of one thousand francs a-year, the remnant of my fortune, and my *Magasin de Chaussures*."

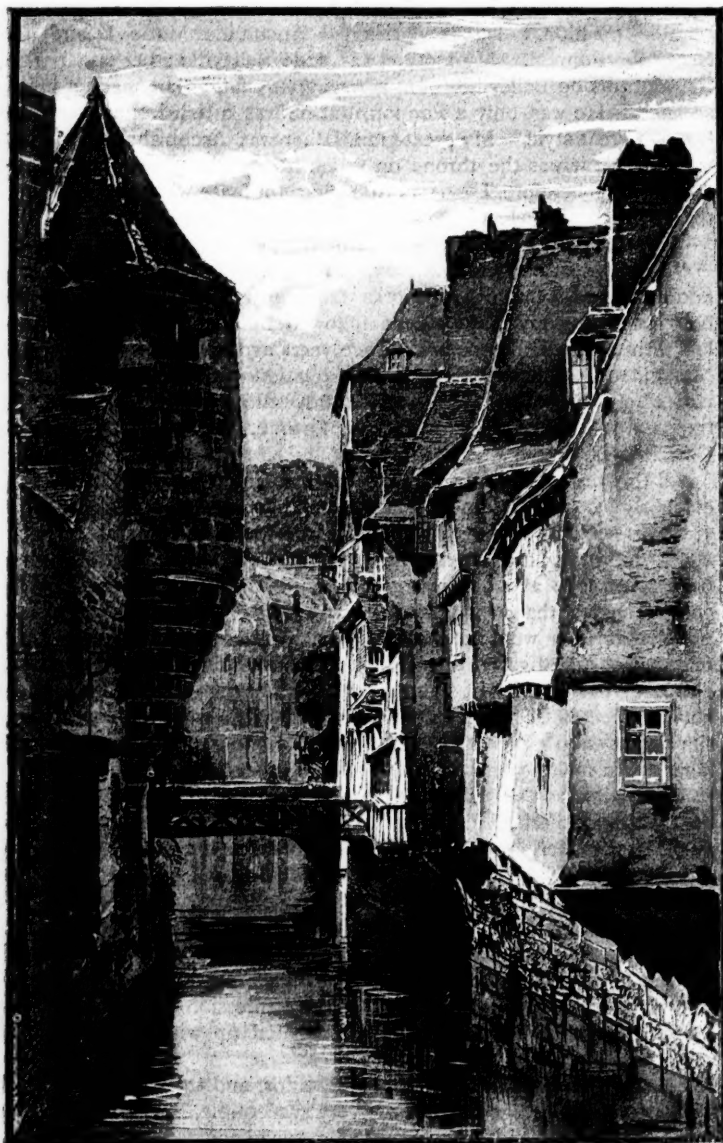
All this time Mademoiselle had been gazing steadfastly at H. C., evidently lost in admiration. As she must have been at least twenty years his senior, we were quite unprepared for what followed.

In the most delicate manner possible she intimated that she believed in love at first sight; that there was a kindred affinity in certain souls; that when these certain souls met Something whispered that they were intended for each other; that the very first moment she had gazed upon H. C. this Something told her that she had met her fate; that she had never seen such eyes before, and never expected to do so again; and that if he would espouse her, she would endow him with all her worldly goods, and would spend her days in making him happy.

It was extremely embarrassing. Mademoiselle Ponpon was evidently mad upon this subject, though she might be sane upon all others. Her troubles must have affected her brain; and no wonder, if they were as great as she had described. It was very sad altogether. She was a little, bright-eyed gentlewoman of about forty-five, with all the manner about her of the world to which she of right belonged. She must once have been very pretty, but time had faded her cheek, there were lines of care upon her brow, and her abundant hair was perfectly white. In repose the expression of her face was sad and pathetic, but it occasionally lighted up with a very bright smile.

I put on all the gravity of an ambassador, and translated her offer to H. C. with all dignity. Being very susceptible, he was evidently flattered, and blushed in what Mademoiselle must have thought a very becoming manner.

"She is certainly very charming and ladylike," he said, clearing his throat nervously, and fidgeting uneasily in his chair. "I could



QUIMPER.

write a poem about her. But it has come upon me unexpectedly ; I feel rather bewildered. And then, is there not a clause in the Prayer-Book which forbids a man to marry his grandmother ?”

“ I believe so,” I replied ; “ though I don’t know much about the matter. But one feels that a man ought not to marry his grandmother. And what would Lady Maria say ? ”

“ I am afraid she wouldn’t approve. Mademoiselle is very nice and charming in herself, but—her surroundings ! No ; I must decline the honour.”

“ But what am I to reply ? ”

“ Tell her that I am very flattered ; deeply sensible of the honour ; think her very charming ; but cannot accept her.”

“ What excuse can I make, to best spare her feelings ? ”

“ Say that I am an English monk, vowed to celibacy ; that I am in Brittany for change of air and the study of ecclesiastical architecture. Add, if you like, that I had an early disappointment, and retired to the cloister with shattered health and a broken heart.”

All of which I duly translated.

Mademoiselle heaved a deep sigh. She did not seem in the least put out, or inclined to commit suicide.

“ It is always thus,” she replied, “ and for the tenth time I have to play Héloïse to someone else’s Abelard. I think that I also shall end by taking the veil. But if Monsieur will not accept my offer of marriage, at least he will do me the honour of taking some black coffee. It was ready, even when we came up.”

And giving directions to a maiden who appeared at her summons, the latter presently returned with three cups of such exquisite quality that H. C. almost regretted his hasty refusal. Mademoiselle seated herself with dignity upon the throne of her great-grandfather the Archbishop, and without doubt made a very interesting picture. Presently, the coffee duly taken, appreciated and praised, Mademoiselle escorted us down the narrow staircase and dismissed us, just as she had received us, with smiles and curtsies. It seemed evident, not only that she was not heart-broken, but that she had forgotten all about her offer of marriage.

We went back, rather perplexed, to Madame de Kermadec.

“ Did she offer you marriage ? ” laughed Madame. “ *Pauvre chère Mademoiselle Ponpon !* Do not be distressed. She is not heartbroken. It is the one subject on which her troubles have turned her brain. I was wicked enough to whisper something about Monsieur’s eyes to her, and I knew what would follow. I assure you that the little episode will make her quite happy for a month to come. She will declare, and she will think, that it was you who made the offer to her, and that she had the honour of refusing you.”

The afternoon was waning as we went back to the hotel by way of the Steir. We had very little sunshine during our stay at Quimper, but this evening the clouds had broken and the rays fell and flashed

upon the water. There was nothing like the scene in all the town ; nothing so picturesque and old-world, and complete. The dormer windows in the high roofs caught the sun's reflection and seemed on fire. A woman wearing a Breton cap thrust forth her head from a small window in the round tower, and appeared much amused whilst H. C. took her with the small camera. The water rippled and lapped against the foundations of the houses. In the distance more houses closed the scene, backed by the high cliffs that shut in the old town, and make it oppressive and hot and enervating. We agreed with Catherine : to live in Quimper would mean a slow death. And the hotels do nothing to encourage one. They are all uncomfortable, more or less badly managed ; crowded with commercial travellers, who care for an abundant bill of fare at dinner-time, but upon whom anything in the way of refinement would be lost.

"I shall be thankful to leave Quimper," I remarked to H. C. ; "I am like Catherine—I cannot breathe here. It is overpowering. Everything grates upon you. It is all infinitely more uncivilized than a humble village inn."

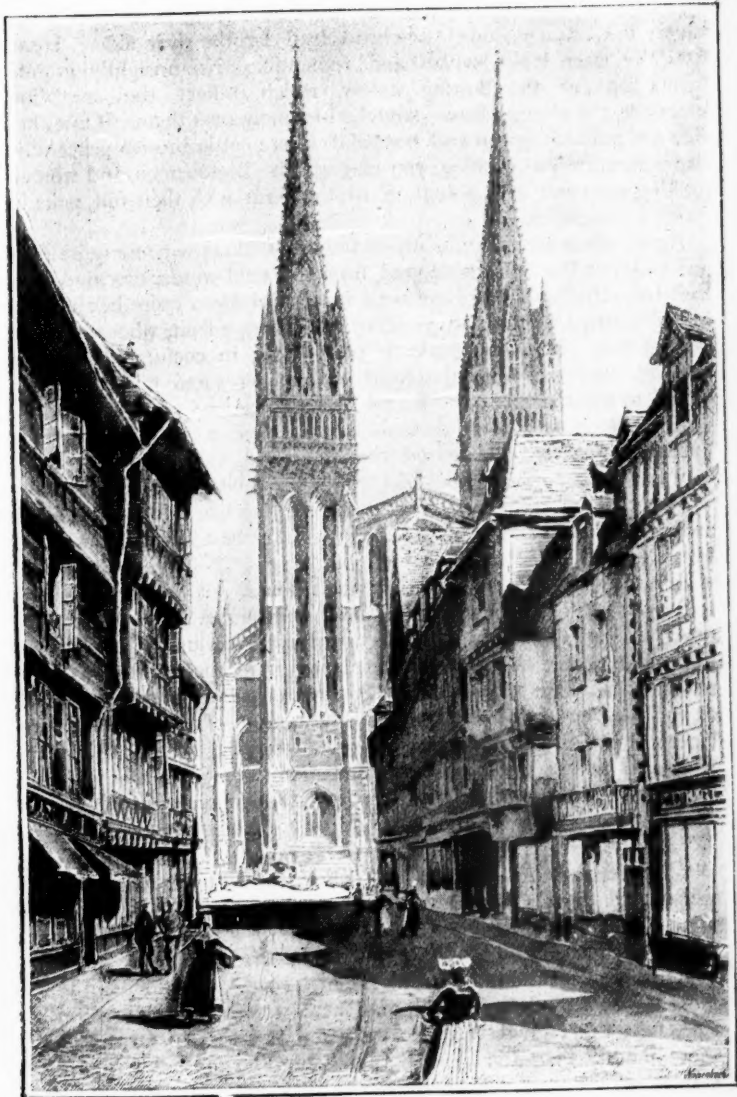
"I don't know," returned H. C., who, for a poet and the nephew of Lady Maria, can make himself singularly happy and comfortable in the midst of the most disturbing elements—"I don't know. I like Quimper. It fetches me. The peasantry are the most interesting we have seen. Nowhere else have we found any costume. I should like to spend a month here."

"And cultivate Mademoiselle Ponpon's society," I returned, rather hotly.

He blushed. "She is very charming," he said. "I almost think I did wrong to refuse her. A woman who can make such excellent black coffee must be a domestic treasure. And after all, her grandfather was a marquis and her great-grandfather an archbishop. But then there is that clause in the Prayer-Book about a man and his grandmother. You cannot get over that."

The next morning was dull and grey, and threatened rain. It had poured in torrents all night, and would no doubt soon begin again. But we had decided to see the environs of Quimper, and seldom changed our plans for the weather.

If we had thought little of the Morlaix carriages, we thought less of those of Quimper. They were like the hotels : wanted reconstructing and reorganising. Our landlord sent for the best the town could supply. Driver, horse and conveyance all matched, and promised a general breakdown long before we returned. The man looked as if he had come straight from the plough ; seemed as stupid as he was uncouth, but proved himself very much the contrary. No sooner had he mounted his box than a new spirit appeared to enter into him. He whipped up his horse and made it fly up and down the hills, until the rickety old trap which they called a victoria seemed doomed.



QUIMPER.

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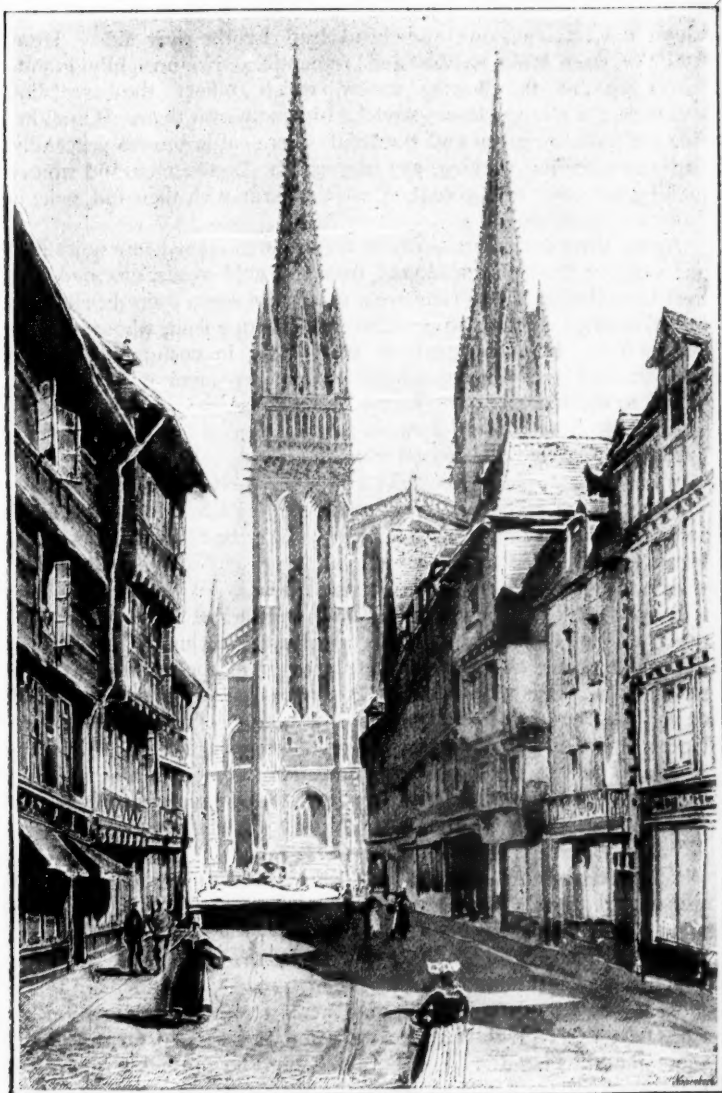
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QUIMPER.

The drive itself in fair and sunny weather is very picturesque. The country is undulating and well wooded. Long avenues of trees, where the branches meet overhead, lead by the river side. Here, too, the river looks sylvan and romantic. No unsightly granite banks confine the flowing waters, which reflect the spreading branches, the glinting leaves stretched lovingly over them. On either side are pastures, green and beautiful, where cattle browse peacefully, and where, in the evening, you may see the Breton men and women milking the cows and going off to the farm with their full pails in quite a procession.

Again, there are environs where the undulations become quite hills and valleys; the latter sheltered from the cold winds, crowded with fruit trees that in spring-time are a mass of blossom quite bewildering in its beauty; in autumn yielding its rich ripe fruit, whose harvests seldom fail. Here the peasants often work in costume, which has not yet died out from the heart of Finistère, and give a certain charm to the scene.

At the top of one of these hills, we espied a large house which looked very private and retired from the world.

"Depend upon it," said H. C., growing excited, "the ladies that we saw at the confessional the other evening live there. Let us go and call; we can but be refused, and we may be admitted. It would be an experience."

So we questioned the driver as to the house.

"No, sirs," he replied; "those ladies do not live there, but just the other side of Quimper. That is the lunatic asylum. It is always full. The people of Quimper are for ever going mad; not raving, but melancholy. It is the weather. It always rains in Quimper. And, as you see, the town is in a hole; at the bottom of a basin, as it were. There is no air; it is unhealthy and depressing. So a great many people go mad; some for good, some periodically. It is a nice change for them. As you see, the place is beautifully situated, and they are very happy up there."

"Do the visitors also ever go mad?" asked H. C. anxiously.

"Sometimes," answered our driver, with a humorous intonation we should never have given him credit for. "It is not at all uncommon. But now, sirs, I will take you to a singular old house; the oldest house in all Brittany, I verily believe."

As he spoke he turned out of the high road down a lane. It was more than a foot deep in mud, and there were high hedges on either side. At the end of the lane we came to a sort of farmyard, still more muddy than the lane, bordered on two sides by sheds and stables, on the third side by the house.

It was all that the driver had declared. He assured us that it was a thousand years old, and, built of stone, massive and well-preserved, rich in tone, it looked it. The house was plain, with the exception of the exquisite doorway, which was richly ornamented. The

windows had been altered, and had partly lost their antiquity. They were large and long, the one nearest the ground being closed with rickety old shutters. The mullioned stonework was still in excellent



OUR OLD HOUSE.

condition. The house was in two parts, as it were, one higher than the other. The windows in the lower portion had been less interfered with. The mullioned frames of thick stonework, in the form

of a cross, were still perfect. The roofs, high and slanting, were also decorated with small, quaint windows.

As the driver stopped, a woman in a Brittany cap came to the doorway, and in that rich and antique frame she made a striking picture. The house was nothing but a humble farmhouse and she was its humble mistress. A maid in clanking wooden sabots was flourishing about with a pail.

The interior of the house corresponded with the exterior. It seemed absolutely untouched. The furniture was old and carven, though rough and homely. Immense beams ran across the ceilings; the fireplaces were substantial and enormous, with stone copings. The staircases were massive and ancient, and there was a great deal of old stone carving in the nooks and turnings. In the bedrooms the bedsteads that had been used centuries ago were still in use; bedsteads that were simply huge wooden boxes curiously carved, like some of the woodwork one sees in Egypt. The only access to the interior of this great box was by a hole at the foot, through which they crawled in very uncomfortable fashion. It was so in days gone by; it is so now where the bedstead, having descended as an heirloom from generation to generation, is still used.

Everything was untouched and in perfect preservation: everything in keeping. The rooms were large and barely furnished. One immense room was half filled with apples, and huge stone grotesques looked down upon them: a room in which the rats must have held high revelry for undisturbed generations—heirlooms of the house, like the grotesques and the old bedsteads and the massive doors.

To the people who live there it is nothing more than an old farmhouse, and they seemed unable to understand our exclamations of surprise and delight. "A primrose by the river's brink, a primrose 'twas to him." So was it here. The beauties of antiquity were nothing to them. The halo that a thousand years had thrown over the house they could not discern. But it was worth while coming to Quimper, only to see this house: only to see the picture that the two women made as they stood in the doorway to be photographed: one adorned with a pail, the other with a broom. In this they took a lively interest, and begged that in due time we would send them copies.

We were charmed with our driver for showing us this wonderful old place. We had heard nothing about it; had no idea that the neighbourhood of Quimper possessed anything so interesting.

"No," he remarked; "no one ever comes here. No one thinks anything of it. But I saw that you were interested in old houses, and I don't think you will easily beat that one for age. I knew it was just what you would like."

He was quite right; and next to the cathedral of Quimper this old house would again attract us to the town.

As we returned, we paid a visit to our fellow traveller at the

palace ; first dismissing our driver with a bountiful reward for the injustice we had done him in our thoughts, and for the pleasure he had given us. But there was some excuse for us—nature had not been kindly towards him ; and when he drove off with his vehicle, which was as antiquated as the very house we had just visited, we should have said, had we not known better, that he was a very fitting candidate for the lunatic asylum he had pointed out to us.

Our fellow-traveller was at home, and accorded us a warm welcome. He was resting in a magnificent room that breathed out quite an ecclesiastical atmosphere : a room of the past, full of refinement and beauty and dignity. It looked on to the lovely and secluded garden attached to the Palace at Quimper.

"I have employed my leisure moments in writing a history of the Church," he presently said, when we had touched on various indifferent topics. "A history of the Church in its broad outlines, not in its minute details. I never had patience to go into details. There I think I should have made a good commander, had I been destined to the army. I hold that a good general should lay down a broad, comprehensive plan of campaign, and leave all details to his officers."

"And when will your history appear?" we asked.

"I do not know," he laughed ; "perhaps never. I have written it because I love the work ; for my own amusement, rather than for publication. But I was about to observe that this history is my reason for being at Quimper at the present moment. I had occasion to refer to certain rare works that happen to be in the palace library, and having a week to spare I am thus using it. It is at once work and recreation to me. Then I am quite at home here : know and am well known."

We told him of our experience in the cathedral the evening of our arrival.

"Ah !" he cried ; "they are saintly women ; the Marys of this world, full of good works ; humbly sitting at the foot of the Cross ; taking up their daily round. One of them, my cousin, renounced the world for this. She was beautiful and married young, the Comte de B—. Everything that the world held of attraction, luxury and delight was at her feet. Her husband adored her. It was a marriage of love, not of convenience. At the end of a year she was the mother of a lovely son. The happiness of the father and mother seemed complete. It was, indeed, happiness too great to last. Another six months had changed light to darkness. The Count in the height of his happiness, the flower of his youth and beauty, was thrown from his horse and lived only long enough to clasp his wife in his arms and bless her with his dying breath. In less than two months, the child followed the father, a victim to scarlet fever. Her last consolation taken from her, the mother, in spite of every opposition from her family, withdrew from the world. Here she came, and here she has

remained. 'Having suffered affliction,' she said, 'I have learnt to pity the afflicted. The remainder of my life shall be devoted to them.' She has kept her resolution, proved better than her word. These women are indeed a community of saints. But now," he broke off, "you must dine with me this evening. Nay, I will take no refusal. Your travelling dress? That as a matter of course. I am quite alone to-night. You shall tell me of England; of other lands if you know them; I will make you acquainted with Brittany. Then, on Sunday when you come to hear me preach, you will know a little more of the preacher and the people that surround you than you do now. I have bidden old André, the Suisse, keep places for you."

"So he informed us," we said. "He seems, indeed, a singular character."

"Singular and good, in spite of his mania about ghosts and shadows. He has haunted the cathedral until its silence and gloom, the stillness of night, have slightly affected his brain. But he is an interesting character, devoted to me, and I shall miss his familiar figure when his place knows him no more. At seven, then, I shall expect you," he said, as we got up to leave. "You will not fail me. I will show you some rare old volumes and manuscripts that will delight you. And when the last shades of night are falling, we will summon old André, and make him take us all through that beautiful old cathedral. We will enjoy the solemn silence, the sacred atmosphere, the wonderful aisles and arches, the witching twilight. And if the hour and the place should inspire you, the layman shall mount the pulpit and preach a sermon to the ecclesiastic. I will sit at the feet of Gamaliel."

We left him. The daylight hours wore away, and as the deep-toned cathedral bell struck the hour of seven, the smaller bell at the palace gate clanged out upon the air, the great portal immediately opened and closed upon us, and once more we found ourselves within the lovely precincts of the palace garden.



A RISKY REVENGE.

A True Incident.

IT was in the year 188—. The Carnival was drawing to its close, and Turin was amusing itself in its usual way—dancing here, playgoing there ; singing, shouting, supping, laughing, love-making, buying and selling everywhere ; brawling and squabbling one moment, and embracing the next. More or less, the entire population seemed to be drinking freely of the draught of pleasure, knowing by experience that the approaching ashes would be dry enough ; and, if you had looked with attentive eyes, you would have learned to class and qualify the different degrees of intoxication indulged in (of course I mean moral intoxication). Ten days or so yet remained for the unrestrained exercise of toe and tongue before the long and lugubrious Lent would put in her appearance—lank and lean, with forbidding face, and with besom in hand to sweep away all frivolity for a season ; and of these ten days everyone seemed intent upon making the most. At the end of them, many who were able to do so would hurry off to Milan for the Carnevalone and a final draught of pleasure, blessing St. Ambrogio in their hearts for having conferred upon the sister city the privilege of a few extra hours of dissipation. It was a queer boon for a saint to bestow ; but I never yet heard anybody abuse him for doing so—on the contrary, I can safely assert its having procured him quite a harvest of blessings.

But to my story.

Let us enter a drawing-room on the first floor of one of the best houses in Via della Lecca.

The apartment is large, well-proportioned, and expensively furnished, and contains certain objects that are usually consigned to another chamber : a case of pistols, a pair of foils, dumb-bells, a riding-whip or two, to say nothing of an enormous mastiff on the hearth-rug and an ape upon the high back of a carved oak chair. An entire table is given up to cigars and their relative belongings. The grand piano, in ebony and gold, is laden with the scores of operas and other music ; there are books in the principal modern languages littered about, or ranged in somewhat untidy rows in the dwarf bookcases. There are pictures on the walls, fluffy rugs upon the carpet, old china on brackets, low sofas and luxuriant chairs, plants in the windows, wealth everywhere. Yet the ensemble would not please one in a hundred, for the walls and furniture are covered in dark green, the former in velvet, the latter in brocade, and the effect of the total is dismal and depressing in the extreme.

No stranger could have declared, if called upon to do so, whether

the room was that of a man or a woman. He would have been obliged to say: "If to a man, he must be a poor, effeminate creature; if to a woman, she must be a virago." George Sand, Princess Metternich, Rosa Bonheur, or Sarah Bernhardt might have indulged in a similar saloon without a word's being said on the matter; but there were neither Bonheurs nor Bernhardts, Metternichs nor Sands at Turin; so it gave rise to much small talk; and many who had never seen it described it as a kind of Bluebeard's chamber, easy enough to enter, but difficult to escape from unscathed.

And there was some slight shade of truth in the latter assertion. Good round sums had passed from the purses of the luckless to the pockets of the lucky within the shelter of those sap-green walls. But in all honesty and honour, be it understood. Stakes usually ran high, it is true, but playing was not compulsory, and all were perfectly free to risk or refrain, as best they pleased.

The Breguet clock upon the verde antico chimney-piece is chiming two as a lady visitor enters the room, and, throwing off her boa, crosses its entire breadth and ensconces herself in one of the comfortable chairs opposite the fire. She is evidently an habituée of the place, for Tom, the mastiff, gives her a sleepy welcome—a glance with motionless head and a wag with mutilated tail—after which, like Dr. Watts's sluggard, though without "turning," he peacefully "slumbers again."

The ape's reception was less amiable. He chattered and grinned from his perch, running along it from left to right and right to left, as if uncertain, from previous experience, what to expect—a cuff or a caress—and desirous of showing himself prepared for one or the other. Countess Avogadro had administered both on sundry well-remembered occasions.

She was a pretty little woman, plump and pleasing; with a good income and a keen relish for life; and, best of all, a husband who adored her to the extent of never denying her anything. She drove and danced through life to her heart's content; while he, heavy and hulking, followed in her wake as best he could.

The dark portière is jerked aside and the mistress of the house enters. With a nick of welcome to the Countess, and an exclamation of "what horrible weather!" uttered in a deep voice, she flings herself into the chair opposite her guest.

You then at once catch the reason of her surrounding herself with household gods the colour of sodden spinach. Her face is amongst the most ill-favoured ever seen. Nothing better than a skull, that has turned brown from being buried in damp earth, can give an adequate idea of it.

She is rich, a widow, childless, healthy, clever, even witty; but ugly with an ugliness that no pen can describe, and that must be seen to be understood.

Her year of mourning past, Madame Durò burst forth in an

entirely new line. She had always been a blue-stockings—now she appeared to aim at becoming a blackleg. She played, shot, hunted, fenced, boxed, smoked, and even dressed in male attire at times. It was whispered that she had challenged an officer, and would actually have fought, had he not, with a hearty laugh, declined the duel. In fact, she showed herself a perfect riddle, a second edition of Count Eon—a something, in a word, that everybody laughed at, and whose dinners everyone was glad and ready to eat.

"Well, Lulu, and what's the news?" asked Madame Durò, after she had lit a cigarette, crossed her legs comfortably, and settled herself to her liking.

"Little or nothing, that I know of. Why were you not at Countess Rinaldi's last night?"

"I couldn't go. I went to see the fencing match, and brought a tribe here to supper afterwards."

"Well, it was a pity you did not come. Her brother was there, you know."

"What, the diplomat? Well, I am sorry I missed him. He has travelled so much; and they say that he is very agreeable."

"As agreeable as handsome. But you have seen him yourself?"

"Yes; we met at Baroness Brizzi's, but were not introduced."

"You are sure to meet him again. I heard him say he was going to the Veglione on Tuesday."

"All right. And how is the Rinaldi?"

"Lively and spiteful as ever. I never heard such a tongue."

"Of course not. Two such would be quite too much for the town. And whom did she flay?"

"All her friends who were absent."

"Me amongst the number, then?"

"Of course. But not very severely."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, only that you were not half so clever and witty as you wished to appear."

"Spiteful cat! I'll pay her out, though. I believe she carries her hump full of malice, ready to produce on occasion."

"I daresay she does. If you had heard her go on about Letizia Gamba!"

"And why? What has the poor girl done to her?"

"Nothing—only people say she would be a good match for her brother."

"So she would. And then?"

"The Countess doesn't want him to marry anybody; for if she can keep him single, his money will go to her children."

"Yes; I see. Had you any music?"

"A little. The Countess sang."

"That's all she can do, sing and slander. Her voice is certainly splendid. Were she not hump-backed, she could go on the stage to-morrow."

"Apropos. What have you decided upon for Tuesday night?"

"A domino, I think."

"So have I. One can enjoy oneself so much more. And I am going to dance—oh, for hours."

"Miles, you mean."

"Yes, if you like. And so is Avogadro. And we are going to have such a galop together. Big as he is, there isn't a man in Turin can dance like him."

A vision of a gambolling elephant rose to Madame Durò's mental eye. But she said nothing. She knew how infatuated—the word is the world's, not mine—her friend was with her husband, and she laughed at her for being so, even while confessing to herself that it must be all very pleasant.

The image of another man rose and drove out the remembrance of the Count's uncouth attractions—that of Countess Rinaldi's brother. Her discoloured face flushed. It might have been the fire; it might also have been anger at the Countess having tried to diminish her merit in the eyes of the only man in all Turin whom she cared to please, and whom she had secretly determined to try and conquer. It was a bold ambition, but Madame Durò was also a bold woman, and whatever might have been the cause of that flush, she was forced to turn her attention to other things; for visitors made their appearance, and soon a Babel of tongues usurped the somewhat oppressive quietude of that much-maligned and dismal drawing-room.

The Veglione at the Scribe Theatre was at its height. In the boxes were seated all the fashion and elegance of the town; in the pit, which had been boarded over level with the stage, a turbulent crowd whirled and waltzed, undulated and flowed—a tide of gaiety and excitement—a very kaleidoscope of colour. A garden of tulips suddenly endowed with life and sentiment; motion mingled with something very like a touch of madness.

Banners and draperies hung round the house; they quivered in the heated air upon which a hundred odours floated. A flood of light from above illumined the gay scene. It fell full upon tinsel and tawdriness; upon velvet and silk; upon paste diamonds and dominos; upon kings and queens, courtiers and pages; sailors and shepherds; sweeps and harlequins; cooks and clowns; upon every sort of garment and personage one could desire or devise—the uniform of the soldier and the robe of the priest excepted.

In one of the Court boxes sat a party of ladies and gentlemen—mere spectators, and clad in ordinary evening dress. Countess Rinaldi was its hostess for the night, and the visits paid her had already been numberless. Society runs after those it fears quite as much as after those it loves. Perhaps even more.

"There is your brother, at last," said a lady to the Countess ; "standing just under No. 5."

The Countess adjusted her glasses ; then said :

"Yes, it is Alfonso. He told us he should be late. I suppose he'll honour me with a visit when he gets tired of being elbowed by the mob yonder. I cannot—— Ah, bon soir, Monsieur le Baron ; je suis charmée de vous voir," pursued Madame Rinaldi, breaking suddenly off and gliding into French to welcome the attaché who just entered the box, and who spoke neither Italian nor Piedmontese.

"Why are you so late ?"

"I come from Madame de Castellengo's. She has been good enough to sing to me. What a voice is hers !"

"Not more beautiful than that of the Comtesse Rinaldi," put in an elderly gentleman who was fearfully afraid of the lady's tongue and never let slip an occasion of propitiating it.

"Oui, c'est bien vrai," rejoined Madame Durò, rising to retire. "Et puis, où trouverez vous un dos (do) comme celui de la Comtesse ! Il est unique, tout à fait unique."

Then, with a would-be-innocent smile and a nod of adieu, she slipped out of the box, leaving the Countess mute with rage and purple with repression. Madame Durò's Parthian shaft was clever as it was cruel : to notice would be to acknowledge ; so her ladyship was forced to suffer in impotent silence and note with inward ire that the double entendre had been fully appreciated by her guests of the moment.

Meanwhile, Madame Durò, instead of descending to her loge, which was on the first tier and which was filled with friends, sped along the deserted corridor, up a flight of stairs, and then on to a remote upper box which she had taken the precaution secretly to secure. Her heart was light as her step—her wicked sally had been successful ; and, till then, all her little plans had prospered. She reached the little dingy den without having met more than a few stragglers, none of whom had recognised her ; she entered it a dark domino, to emerge from it, a few minutes later, as charming a vivandière as any could wish to see. This implies that she was closely masked.

It was a cruel trick of Fate to have united so plain a face to so faultless a figure. Her hands and feet were perfect, and the dress she had chosen displayed every curve of her form to the best advantage.

Throwing aside the brusque air and man-like motion she generally displayed as a sort of token of defiance to the world, and a challenge to criticism, she tripped lightly down the stairs and, a few minutes later, entered the pit.

The revel was at its height, and the whole scene a fair suggestion of Pandemonium. An unceasing roar ; an endless rush ; a close atmosphere, a light rendered lurid by the dust floating overhead ; such was what she encountered ; and it was some little time before

she could discover and approach the person she had come to seek. She found him at last, however, and managed, after a little manœuvring, to secure a position in which he could not fail to notice her.

The Marquis Garofalo was not a bit like his hump-backed sister, Countess Rinaldi. He was tall and well built, with a thoughtful face and somewhat dreamy eyes—a man such as any woman might be eager to win, and any wife proud to wear.

It was not very long before he managed to make his way to where the vivandière was standing, and addressed her with one of the stereotyped phrases in use on similar occasions. She replied in a voice that was evidently disguised but, at the same time, pleasing. Quite different to the inane, parrotty scream so common to masked balls; as also were her words to the imbecile rubbish generally uttered thereat. The Marquis at once felt that he had come across no common personage, and a very short study of her beautifully-formed hands and fairy feet confirmed him in his conviction.

A conversation ensued in which the lady contrived to exhibit, and all without any manifest intention of display, a wit tempered by delicacy, a knowledge of the world and its ways, and a sound judgment, such as aroused no slight curiosity and admiration in her companion.

They made a tour of the scene, arm-in-arm. The vivandière seemed to know everybody and to be recognised by none.

"Who can she be?" thought the Marquis. "She evidently belongs to Turin; yet she is quite unlike anyone I ever met before."

Finally they sat down upon a bench and passed in review the occupants of the boxes. His admiration and wonder increased at every sally. Apropos of one she quoted "*Hamlet*" in the original; apropos of another "*Les Précieuses Ridicules*"; Goethe of a third. She seemed to speak all languages equally well, and not only to have read much, but also to have profited by and retained what she had read. The Marquis, a somewhat serious man in the main, was out of himself at last with pleasure and surprise.

One thing alone worried and vexed him: her decided refusal to unmask. No entreaty could move her.

"Not even for a moment?" he pleaded.

"Not even for a moment. At some future time—but I cannot tell either when or where—you shall see my face, and——"

"It cannot fail to be a charming one. With such a figure, such a mind! Ah, you cannot be other than beautiful."

"Don't be too sure."

"Now you are jesting. But have pity; tell me, at least, where we are to meet."

"There is still a Veglione at the Regio, and two or three private masked balls—we shall meet at one or the other."

"But at which?"

"Who knows?"

"You promise me, at least?"

"I promise you."

"And you will unmask?"

"Yes."

"And by what token am I to recognise you?"

The vivandière broke into a hearty laugh. Then :

"There! Convicted by your own words of false compliments. If I am so superior in form to the rest of my sex, as you have been trying for the last half hour to persuade me, how can you have any difficulty in recognizing me? Ah, Marquis, I have caught you at last!"

"Not at all. For Venus herself could pass unnoticed under a domino, and if you were to wear one ——"

"Just what I intend to. Well, never mind, I will make myself known to you."

"And till then?"

"You will eat and drink and sleep as usual, I suppose."

"Well; I am not very sure of that."

"Shall you be thinking too much of Letizia Gamba?"

"Of Letizia Gamba? No, indeed. She is a good, nice girl; but I require something more than that."

"Money, perhaps. But Letizia has that."

"I don't care a straw for money—I have plenty of my own."

"Beauty then?"

Her voice trembled slightly as she put the question. The Marquis hesitated. Then, after a moment's pause: "Well, no man is indifferent to beauty, whatever he may say to the contrary. But I will admit that there are other possessions which, in a wife, fully make up for the want of beauty. A man of sense chooses his better half for her moral qualities. He who chooses his for her face alone must be a fool."

An increasing uproar and a terrific swaying to and fro of the crowd put a stop to all further conversation. The final, frantic gallopade had begun. They rose from their bench.

Like a leaf by the surge, the vivandière was swept from his side, and the Marquis found himself alone.

The Marquis Garofalo passed a long and most wearisome night at a private masked ball in the hope of meeting the vivandière who, at the Scribe, had made such an impression upon him. But all in vain. No vivandière was there; nor anyone, indeed, whom he could identify with the lady of his longing.

He went home, if not in despair, at least in a most melancholy mood. But there a consolation, as supreme as unexpected, awaited him. A letter of over three pages, smelling faintly of attar of roses, charmingly expressed, and written in a bold, clear hand that was rather masculine than otherwise in its character. It was signed "Vivandière."

Weariness and vexation spread their wings and fled. He flung
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himself into an arm-chair before the fire ; dismissed his wondering valet, and read and re-read the welcome epistle.

It was as charming as the lady's conversation had been ; witty at times, sensible ever ; yet not in the least premeditated or book-like.

"She is one in a thousand !" exclaimed the Marquis, laying down the letter upon the little table beside him and lighting a cigar.

"She is one in a million !" he ejaculated, upon coming to the end of a third perusal.

Then he set to work to count the hours that must elapse before the Veglione at the Royal Theatre should take place—to which Veglione, she wrote him, she should go ; adding that he would find her in Box No. 15 on the second tier.

The Marquis was in the seventh heaven, and on going to bed, slipped the letter under his pillow. His last thought before falling off to sleep was the determination to go to the box-office as soon as he had breakfasted. And so he did. But he might have saved himself the trouble, for he was unable to learn anything. The box had been taken and paid for by a servant in plain livery. Had it been the matter of a regular subscription the name would have been asked and registered—but for a single night no such formality as booking was practised.

As he came downstairs he cursed the impresario for an imbecile and the book-keeper for a buffoon.

And, having relieved himself thus rationally, he returned home to cajole time as best he might.

The Marquis's standing was such as permitted of his being unfashionable when it so pleased him ; owing to which, eleven o'clock found him already in the house, looking up anxiously at No. 15.

Nothing but the closely-drawn curtains rewarded his diligence.

Well, he thought, he was on the spot, at any rate, and that was better—ininitely better—than being at home and watching the hateful hands of the clock. So he took a turn in the house, peeped into the foyer, and then returned to take another look at the—for the present—haven of his hopes.

The boxes were slowly filling, but No. 15 was as yet in statu quo.

A wild impulse of mounting to try the door assailed him ; but good sense came to the rescue and he remained where he was.

Slowly the minutes dragged on. All Turin seemed to be flocking in—to the boxes above and the pit below. All, save the person whom alone he had come to meet.

He, usually so calm and dignified, was growing agitated and irritable to a degree such as to render a strong effort over himself needful to reply with equanimity to the numerous greetings he encountered.

"What the deuce is the matter with Garofalo this evening?"

asked a young officer of his companion. "He looks and speaks like a savage."

"Been losing at play, I suppose. I heard they staked high at the club last night."

"Well, I daresay it was that. I hope for his friends' sake he doesn't lose often."

And away they strolled, arm-in-arm. They were of those who looked upon the loss of Louis d'ors as the only one authorising loss of temper.

At last the happy moment arrives. The crimson silk curtains flutter faintly—they are drawn aside by a firm hand, and then, oh bliss! a lady in a dark green domino and black velvet mask appears. She gazes leisurely round the house, one faultlessly-formed hand resting upon the edge of the box; surveys the now rapidly filling pit, then seats herself somewhat in the background and out of the immediate glare of the light.

Garofalo allows her ten minutes respite, and then mounts to the assault.

"She promised she would unmask," he repeated to himself. "I shall see her at last!"

He reached the door, paused for a second, then knocked gently.

"Avanti," replied a voice that caused his heart—diplomat though he was—to bound in his bosom.

He opened the door and entered.

There sat his dream of the last few days. She extended her hand to him, and bade him take the fauteuil opposite. She was evidently glad to see him, and he fancied he divined a smile behind that hateful mask.

"She promised to take it off," he thought again, "and then——"

"You received my letter, I see."

"Yes—and allow me to thank you a thousand times for it. You cannot guess what a relief it was. I had made sure of meeting you at the Duchess's."

"And you did not think me very bold?"

"Bold? Why should I? On the contrary, I thought you very kind."

"You deem boldness and kindness incompatible then?"

"Not always. Generally speaking, yes."

"Well, exceptionally, then. Let us look for a case. That of the surgeon, for instance, who cuts in order to cure?"

"Yes. But I have always pitied the surgeon too—for you may be sure he also suffers at the pain he inflicts."

The lady sighed slightly. Then added: "And yet he has the courage to inflict it."

"Do you not admire him?"

"I do more—I envy him."

"You envy him? And why?"

"I am going to play his part."

"His part? When? How?"

"To-night. Before you leave this box."

"Then the patient must be——"

"Il Mauchese Alfonso Garofalo."

"I accept—accept willingly. Nothing you can do, one thing excepted, can torture me; and I am here to-night to conjure you not to do it."

"And that is ——?"

"To deprive me of your presence."

The lady did not reply at once. She seemed to be trying to master some emotion or other. But whether of anger, or what, the Marquis could not discover.

"Perhaps you will not give me the chance?"

"How so? What do you mean?"

"Perhaps it is *you* who will deprive me of *your* presence."

"Impossible! I swear to you——"

"Hush. Don't swear anything. Not yet, at least. Just suppose that I was not the beauty you have seen fit to take for granted that I am—what then?"

"Had you asked me the question at our former meeting I should have hesitated to reply, perhaps. Reflection, your letter, my better self, my heart have taught me otherwise. I can answer without hesitation, and like an honest man. I am so thoroughly convinced of your other good qualities that, even if beauty is not one of your gifts, I shall, if you allow it, place myself and my fortune at your disposal."

"Marquis, Marquis, you are either very generous or very——" she hesitated.

"Silly you would say. I know the world would say so—but I did not expect the word from you."

"It was your own—not mine. Be sure that I would rather think of you as generous."

"Do so, then, and imitate the example ——"

He took one of her hands in his, and raised the other as if to remove her mask.

She drew back, but did not withdraw the hand he was holding.

"Wait a moment. I will keep my promise. I came here to do so."

He drew his chair an inch or two nearer and waited. Anxiety, suffering, hope alternately played upon his countenance.

There was a pause, and, for the first time during the interview, the lady appeared embarrassed.

"So that, however ugly I may be—your—your opinion of me would not change?"

"No, I tell you. Anyone can see and hear that you are a lady to your friends' ends. I can affirm that you are as superior in mind to

all the rest of our great ladies as the sun is to the stars. I only wonder and regret that we have never met before. I wish to Heaven we *had* met before. No woman who was not virtuous and good could speak and write as you do. No, I repeat, that if you were as ugly as——” he stopped to seek for a simile—then, in a quicker voice and a triumphant tone, added: “as ugly as Madame Durò herself, it would make no change in me.”

The lady rose slowly, stepped into the full glare of the lamps, and then suddenly removed her mask.

Madame Durò stood before him!


Long, lugubrious Lent had at last come to an end. Frying-pans were enjoying a respite; so were the fishes. The town reeked somewhat less of oil. Butchers were rejoicing.

So also were the birds, for they could once more sing in the budding blackthorn, beneath which the primroses clustered and the violets crept forth, called back to light and life by the smiles of the sky and the warmth of the sun.

Our *ci-devant* Madame Durò, too, rejoiced; she had had her revenge upon the world at large, and upon Countess Rinaldi in particular. For she had married the Marquis—or, I suppose I should say, the Marquis had married her. It is more polite, but, in compensation, less correct. The Archbishop himself performed the ceremony in his private chapel, in presence of a select few only. Madame Avogadro and her burly husband were among the number. Countess Rinaldi had utterly declined to be present. No one was known to mourn over her decision.

And in the actual Marchioness Garofalo you would with difficulty recognise the Madame Durò of former days. She no longer flings the gauntlet into the face of the world by aping the man and studying how best to unsex herself. Despite all her endeavours, she had remained a woman at heart; and she proved it by adoring her husband and by making herself sincerely loved by him in return. She couldn't change her face, of course—and I am not very sure that the Marquis would have wished her to do so, even had it been possible. Love had changed all the rest and that was quite sufficient. Yes; her revenge was a very sweet one, though she and her husband fully agreed as to its having been terribly “risky.”

A. BERESFORD.



LOST IN THE BUSH.

By M. GAUNT.

"I SAY, old fellow."
"Well?"

"I believe it's a case this time. I'm going to peg out."

"Nonsense, Hardy, nonsense. Cheer up, old chap. There's thunder in the air—you'll be better when the storm bursts. Here, have some tea," and Will Hammond crossed the small hut to the sick man's bed, and held a pannikin to his lips.

He pushed it away impatiently. "Tea—tea—tea; they never think of anything but tea in this part of the world; give me some whisky."

"You had the last drop last night."

Hardy turned with a sigh to the wall, and Hammond went back to the flour-barrel on which he had been sitting and his unprofitable meditations.

He had not made a success of life, that was clear. Twenty-five years old to-day—and—looking back, he saw behind him a wasted life. At Oxford—well, his career had been a short and merry one, and at nineteen his father had cast him off and turned him out into the world with twenty pounds in his pocket to manage "as best he could."

"You have disgraced your name, sir—disgraced it—never let me hear from you again."

"I was only a boy," thought the man, bitterly; "only a foolish boy; he might have given me another chance. If it hadn't been for the mater and the girls ——" But he was dead—and so was she—he would never now be able to vindicate himself with the one, nor show his gratitude to the other. How vividly it all came back to him. The cosy, richly-furnished room, and his father's stern voice; and then his mother's clinging arms and tearful kisses.

"My boy—my boy! Don't go far away; it will soon come all right." And then she had thrust into his pocket four ten-pound notes, to which Emmie, his favourite sister Emmie, had added another—all her scanty savings. How good they were, how tender, how loving—those women—and he should never see his mother again. He had taken it very quietly when he got the letter announcing her death a week ago, but to-day, somehow, it came home to him more bitterly.

He had wasted the greater part of that money in a first-class passage to Natal, only to find that the man who is useless in the old country is equally useless in the colonies; and his little stock of money had melted to a single sovereign before, in desperation, he

accepted a post as tutor to some Boer children, whose English mother was ambitious for them. But he liked them no better than they liked him, and when the Zulu war broke out he enlisted in the Mounted Rifles. Then he saw service indeed, and had come through scatheless, but it brought him neither money, nor honour, nor glory; and Emmie wrote that their father still turned a deaf ear to their pleading.

A comrade spoke of Australia as the land of promise; a land flowing with milk and honey; and accordingly thither Will Hammond turned his longing eyes, and finally took a passage to Melbourne—steerage, this time—in one of the Orient Liners which, a few years back, sometimes went round the Cape.

But Australia was no kinder to him than Africa had been. A man without a profession, without even a trade, has but little chance in the great Colonial capital; and he drifted from one odd job to another, picking up a scanty living, but disheartened and despairing, when one day he met by chance and made himself known to his cousin, Walter Hammond.

The elder man had always considered his young cousin had been somewhat hardly dealt with, and being fairly well-to-do, took him home to his house in St. Kilda; saying he should stop with them till they could see what could be done.

That month's visit had been bliss to Will Hammond. His cousin and his cousin's wife had been kindness itself to him. And then there was Nellie Anderson—pretty Nellie Anderson, with her soft, dark eyes and clear, pale skin. She was Mrs. Hammond's great friend; she was always at "The Cedars," for her father, Dr. Anderson, lived next door; and what more natural than that the two young women should sit over their sewing together, and that she, the motherless daughter who reigned supreme over her father's household and her numerous younger brothers and sisters, should come to the older woman often for advice and help? She was the first woman in his own rank of life Will Hammond had met since he had left England. She was warm-hearted and sympathetic, and sincerely and unaffectedly sorry for the young Englishman whom the world seemed to have used so badly. Hammond had no more earnest listener than their elder sister when he told the Anderson children tales of African adventure, of the Zulu war and the Boer war, of Isandlwana and Ulundi. The boys listened open-mouthed, but Nellie never took her eyes off him.

"You must stop it, Mary; you really must," said Hammond to his wife before a week was past. "Will's head over ears in love with her; and she—well—well——"

"But what can I do? She's got into the habit of running in and out at all hours now."

Like every woman, Mrs. Hammond liked a love story; and when both were young and good-looking and dear to her, her sympathies

were enlisted, and she had not the heart to stop it, even if she could.

"Let them alone, Walter; let them alone. Poor little Nell! I'd like her to have some happiness. That family, with all those big boys, is a great care to a girl of nineteen; and the Doctor's away so much, I don't believe he half realises what a hard life poor Nellie has."

"An unhappy love affair won't improve matters."

"It's only poverty," she pleaded. "Will is a good fellow; he really is—see how good he is to baby. His father?—Oh, yes; I know that story—your uncle ought to have been ashamed of himself turning out a boy like that. A wicked old man, I call him. Get Will something to do, and he'll be all right, if he has Nellie to work for."

But it was just the getting something to do that was so difficult; and so the days went on—idle days, in which Will Hammond had nothing to do but sit over the fire and read to the two women as they sat at their work.

The end was inevitable. He must not tell her, he kept saying to himself; he must never tell her—and yet one wintry afternoon when the rain was beating against the window-panes and the cold North wind was lashing the waters of Hobson's Bay into white breakers, and they two were left alone sitting cosily over the fire, he did tell her, and found, to his unspeakable joy, what Mary Hammond had seen days before, that his love was returned. How shy she was—his little girl; but how tender, how loving, and, above all, how hopeful.

"We are young enough," she said shyly, raising her face and looking into his. "We can wait, and you must work. I can't leave my father and the children for a long time yet, you know."

Oh, yes, he would work—but how? He talked it over with his cousin that night, and they decided that since he could get nothing to do that offered a competency in or near Melbourne, the best thing was to go out into the back blocks.

"And the farther the better," said Hammond. "If you're a thousand miles off it can't make much difference if you're two. I tell you what—I wonder I never thought of it before—I believe I can get you a billet on Mungadingadell, old Wilson's station, in Western Australia. It's five hundred miles back from Roebourne, a dreary spot, but I think, on the whole, that's all the better for you. You see, everything's found, and you can save nearly all your salary—be on the look-out—and if you come across any good country, why—take it up, either alone or shares with another fellow—that's the way money's made, now-a-days."

It was all settled, and in less than a fortnight Will had started for Western Australia.

That was in August—and it was only December now, but it seemed to him years since he had left the house on the Esplanade at

St. Kilda—ages since he had seen the fair, pale face with the dark eyes full of tears.

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie, that was the worst parting of all."

The hut was very small, about twelve feet by twenty—built of slabs and bark roofed, with only the hard earth for flooring.

The bed-places were primitive bush stretchers made of sacking fixed on four posts; on one side of the fireplace was a rough shelf, which held a few books, and on the other was their scanty array of crockery—a rough table and two or three three-legged stools, and the flour barrel before mentioned, made up their furniture. Such was Muddy Creek, an out-station of Mungadingadell. James Hardy was in charge. Will Hammond had been sent out the week before as his mate, and Chung Lee was cook and hut-keeper. The head station was at least sixty miles away, and Hammond, as he filled his pipe, looked anxiously at Hardy, and wondered if he were really as ill as he thought himself. He had fallen into a troubled sleep and was tossing backwards and forwards, muttering to himself.

"Him welly sick," said Chung Lee, stealing in and standing beside him. "Him die soon."

"Hold your tongue, Chung Lee," said Hammond, angrily. "What do you know about it?" And he went to the door and stood looking out.

It was already four o'clock, but still over all the landscape was the haze of a great heat. The air quivered with it. Not a breath of wind stirred. The long, yellow grass was motionless, and the gum leaves on the tall, shadeless trees never moved. Not a sound was to be heard; even the shrill cicada and the grasshopper were silent, and the birds had all hidden themselves away from the sun. The forest was dense enough, but just round the hut was a small cleared paddock, where the men kept the horses they rode every day.

Hammond looked up at the sky, a cloudless sky of so deep a blue as almost to be purple.

"Nevertheless," he said to himself, "I believe we shall have a storm, and then Hardy'll be better." And he went back into the hut again, where Chung Lee was still intently regarding the sick man.

"Him die," he said laconically.

Hammond laid an angry hand on the Chinaman's shoulder, and then paused and looked at his mate. It was evident even to his inexperienced eyes that he was worse than he had been that morning, a great deal worse than the night before.

"I shall go into the head station for help," he said, more to himself than to the cook. But that Mongolian raised a loud protest; he was evidently afraid to be left alone, and every argument he could think of likely to detain his boss he brought forward in his pigeon English.

"He, Hammond, didn't know the way, and would get lost. The blacks would attack the hut and eat them both up; and finally Hardy

would die, and he, Chung Lee, would be left alone with the body."

To all of these arguments Hammond turned a deaf ear. And when, after having caught and saddled his horse, he found his mate was delirious and did not know him, he was more determined than ever on going to the head station.

"Hang it all, shut up, Chung Lee," he said. "Lost? I'm not a fool, and there's a track all the way. The blacks haven't been here for a month, and I shall be back to-morrow."

So he set out. It was still very hot, very hot indeed, but the mere fact of doing something—being on the move—made him think less of it. Half-past four, and sixty miles to go. He ought to be there by ten; but no, he could hardly do that, for the moon didn't rise till half-past eight, and he couldn't follow the track in the dark. It would be dark in these latitudes about seven. Well, an hour and a half's rest would do both him and the mare no harm. He felt in better spirits now, and the world did not look so black as it had done when he sat in the hot little hut, watching helplessly as the sick man tossed to and fro. Hardy would get better once he had the proper medicines. There was nothing to be alarmed at—only a touch of fever—and there was country, he knew, well worth taking up a little further back. Why should not he and Hardy go into partnership; it would be sure to pay, and in three years—and as he rode on, building rosy castles in the air, the sun set, and it was time to camp.

He unsaddled the mare, hobbled her, and turned her loose to graze, and then, making a little fire, prepared his evening meal, boiling his billy and eating the damper and salt-beef, which was all Chung Lee had provided. He laughed softly to himself as he thought of the Mongolian's fear.

"Poor Chung Lee, how glad he'll be to see me back to-morrow."

His frugal meal finished, he laid himself down on the ground, his head pillowed on his saddle and gazing up through the branches of the big gum tree he had camped under at a particularly bright star, thought of Nellie, and fell fast asleep.

A crash of thunder wakened him, and he sat up for a moment wondering where he was.

"By Jove! Now for the rain."

There came a vivid flash of lightning, and by its glare he saw the mare close beside him. She was straining at her hobbles in her terror, and he started up to go to her and soothe her. Another deafening crash and down came a deluge of rain; but the mare, in her fright, had snapped her leathern hobbles, dry with the summer's heat, and with a shrill neigh galloped off into the rain and darkness.

In a moment he was after her. It would never do to lose the mare, with over forty miles yet to go before he reached the head

station. So, "Woa, mare—woa—Belle. Good old girl ; woa, I say." But fainter and fainter grew the hoof-beats, and after a desperate attempt to keep up in the vain hope that she might hear his well-known voice and stop, he gave up, and, panting and breathless, leaned up against a tree-trunk.

"Nothing for it but to go back to Muddy Creek, I suppose, and it's at least fifteen miles."

Then, as soon as he got his breath again, he started for his camp. For a few minutes he walked back in the direction he had come, but saw no sign of the camp, the trees were so wonderfully alike ; and besides, in this pouring rain, which was coming down in bucketsful, and the darkness, it was hardly likely he would find a tree marked only by his saddle, billy and cabbage-tree hat. He would wait till the storm was over and the moon rose. His light clothing was already wet through and through, and he was shivering with cold. Could it be that only this afternoon he had felt ill and languid from the great heat ? Then he comforted himself ; if he had to walk back, it was better to do it cool than hot ; and he crushed down every boding fear that would rise unbidden in his mind, and, sheltering under the lee-side of a tree, listened to the monotonous sound of the rain till he dozed in spite of himself.

When he awoke the rain had quite gone, the sky was clear again, and the moon was shining brightly, turning to silver the long, narrow, wet gum leaves.

Now for the camp. Why, there was the very tree—no, there—a little to the right—but again to the left. Alas, the great, tall gum trees shut him in on every side, and one was so cruelly like another, he could not even remember now in which direction he had originally come. The camp did not so very much matter, but the track was of vital importance. Without that track he might wander for days hopelessly in the bush, and that meant—that meant—but no, he would not give up yet ; it was nonsense to think he was lost. He had not run five minutes before he gave up the chase as hopeless ; it was nonsense to think that in so short a time as that he could lose his way hopelessly.

Then he picked out a tree somewhat apart from its fellows and made with his knife a great blaze on it. "Now," he thought, "if I make diagonal stretches from this tree walking for a quarter of an hour in one direction and always coming back to it, I must surely find the track before I have been round the circle."

The first quarter of an hour his heart beat high with hope, and bitter was his disappointment as he returned on his tracks. Again he set out, and again—it was fruitless—and again, and again, and again. All the weary night he walked till the moonbeams began to pale before the coming day. And then, utterly weary and foot-sore, he flung himself down on the ground and covered his face with his hands. "Lost, lost, lost," the words rang in his ears—"utterly lost."

How many tales of lost men he had listened to, and the end had been always the same, and now he was lost himself.

Even if his horse found her way back to Muddy Creek, Hardy was ill, delirious probably, and Chung Lee was useless. It would be a week at least before they would send out to Muddy Creek from the head station—a week before they could even hear of his loss.

He had no food, no water—long before then the cruel hot sun rising up over the tree-tops would have dried up the puddles left by last night's rain, and he must perish, perish miserably by one of the most terrible of deaths. He lay and watched the sun till his eyes closed from very weariness and he fell into a troublous sleep and dreamt; not of Hardy and the little hut by the creek, not of Nellie Anderson and the house on the Esplanade at St. Kilda, but of his boyhood and his sister Emmie. He had hidden her hat and she was crying bitterly.

"It's no good, Em; it is no good. I won't give it back till you promise not to talk to Parker. I won't have you talk to Parker." And she had promised, and he had held out the hat to her, and behold—she was Chung Lee packing damper for him and muttering discontentedly: "Him get lost—him die."

He woke up then and started once more on his weary pilgrimage; but his thoughts were full of Emmie, and back there came to him many incidents of their childhood long ago forgotten.

How she had stood up for Parker, the schoolfellow he had always jeered at. She laughed at him herself, but she had allowed no one else to do so; and after all she had married him, given up everything and braved her father's displeasure to become a poor parson's wife far away in South Devon. Brave Emmie, good Emmie. Why, her boy must be nearly a year old now; the boy she wrote she had called after her dearest brother. He thought about them all day long as he walked backwards and forwards, resolutely putting away another face that would come before him. He could not think of Nellie; he dared not. And on every side the pools were shrinking, shrinking, and he knew that by to-morrow there would hardly be a drop of water left. Part of the night he walked, part slept from very weariness; and when he awakened in the morning he saw that his worst fears were realised: every pool was dry and every trace of the late storm had departed. All the water that remained to him was contained in the little flask he had filled the night before, and that would hardly last him the day. He was hungry, too; ravenously hungry; and he thought grimly of the Zulu hunger belts as he tightened his own, but still he walked steadily on, though the very last rag of hope had left him. He had dreamt of his sister again—dreamt she was reproaching him for not having written. "You might have written, Will; even if you were lost, you might have written," and the thought kept recurring to him again and again—he might write—he must write.

By noon he had finished the last drop in his flask, and by four his lips were parched and dry with thirst, but the sun shone in a cloudless heaven, and there was no chance of rain. He was dying of thirst, and yet he was not fifteen miles from Muddy Creek and safety—if only he could find the way; if only—— He felt so strong and well; the blood was coursing through his veins; could it be that he must die—was dying—a slow and lingering death?

"It was cruel—cruel—oh, my God, my God!—cruel—anything but that."

The paroxysm of passion passed and he remembered his waking thoughts: that he must write; and took out his pocket-book. It was only a common one, but the leathern covers were strong and would probably resist the weather for some little time.

Was it worth while, he thought. Was there a chance of its ever being found? And then he opened it and wrote:

"DEAR LITTLE SISTER,—I have got off the track somehow and am lost in the bush. It just means death, dear, for though they'll be looking for me before the week's out, I can't last out so long. Don't grieve, dear, it's not as bad as you'd think. Say good-bye to the others. I have loved them, but we were always chums, weren't we? I thought of you all last night—you and your boy. My watch is for him—the chain isn't up to much, but it's a rattling good watch. God keep you, little sister.

"Your loving brother,

"WILL."

The other letter was harder.

"Oh, my darling," he wrote at last, "my darling, how can I say good-bye? You gave me the happiest days of my life; it is something to remember, even now. Don't grieve, my sweetheart—not too much. All my hopes and thoughts have been for you. Indeed I have loved you, darling—I do love you; but it is nearly all over now. Good-bye, my sweetheart—good-bye. Till death I am your loving

"WILL."

The tears came into his eyes as he finished: tears, not for himself, but for the loving women who, maybe, would read those pencilled lines, and he kissed the senseless pages because of the tender hands that should touch them in the days to come.

Then on the first page of the book he wrote:

"To you who find this.

"I lost myself the night before last. The track's quite close, I know, but I can't find it. Please send this pocket-book and my watch and chain to Walter Hammond, Esq., The Esplanade, St. Kilda; he will know what to do with them. For mercy's sake don't forget—it is the last request of a dying man. For the love of God do this. It is the last request of Will Hammond of Muddy Creek, Mungadingadell."

As he read them over, the words seemed to him poor and feeble, but there was nothing for it, so he let them stand and added :

"Good-bye, Walter, old fellow ; to you and your wife I owe the deepest gratitude. You did your best for me. Tell Mary to be good to my poor little sweetheart."

He closed the book then and walked on. Had he done with the world ? Were they his last words ? Should he never, never see a kindly human face—hear a kindly human voice again ?

Impossible he could be dying. Impossible, and yet all round him stretched the still, hot bush. Not a drop of water ; not a drop ; the agony seemed more than he could bear. He put a gum-leaf in his mouth, and the strong, pungent, aromatic flavour only made his thirst worse than ever.

The day drew slowly on to a close—the second day. It hardly seemed any cooler but the shadows grew longer and longer, and the insects and birds once more began to stir around. From a dead tree close beside him a laughing jackal raised his hoarse demon-laugh, and was answered by his mate half a mile away ; far, far in the distance sounded the note of the bell-bird : sweet and holy, like the sound of a deep-toned church bell, and far overhead flew a flock of cockatoos, tiny white specks against the deep blue sky. Where they alighted would be water, he knew, but they held steadily on, and as they passed out of sight he sank on his knees with a great sob.

"Oh, my God, my God ! Is there no help—none ?"

The night came, and he tried to keep steadily on. If he could only find the track all might yet be well. Fantastic shapes seemed to come out of the darkness, and he sat down and covered his eyes and dozed till the moon rose—the tropical moon that made the forest bright as day, save where the shadows by contrast were blacker than the blackest night. The sleep had not refreshed him ; he was weary unto death, and there came to him a great longing to die then, if he must die—then in the cool, clear moonlight, not with the cruel, pitiless sun pouring down on him. If he could only die that night instead of lingering on ! But he knew he should not die that night, and he rose and struggled on, though his mouth was parched and dry, his lips and tongue swollen, and his limbs ached till he felt he could hardly put one foot before another. Still he dragged himself on, and a curious fancy came into his head that his mother, his dead mother, was walking beside him, and it comforted him somehow.

"There is no love like a mother's," he thought ; "and now she has come to me in my extremity. Who would have come to me but my mother ?"

Then again he roused himself and remembered he must be dreaming. Lost men went mad, he knew. Was he going mad ? Not yet, at least ; clearly he understood what had happened, and he pulled himself together with a mighty effort, only to begin wondering

why Nellie had not come to him. Was it that her love would not stand such a test? But, no; no, he did not want her to suffer; she should never know what he had suffered, if he could help it; and he toiled on again, as if every step were bringing him nearer to her. It was a long, long night; but the daylight came at last—the cruel, garish daylight; and he remembered it was Sunday. They would be going to church down in St. Kilda. He pictured them to himself: Nellie, with her brothers and sisters in a row beside her, joining in the joyous Christmas hymns. Why were they singing hymns, joyful hymns, when he was slowly dying alone in the bush? “Oh, come let us adore Him! Oh, come let us adore Him!” How clearly the words rang out; how sweet was Nellie’s voice! But, no; they were not singing hymns; it was the low and solemn chant of the Litany: “Good Lord, deliver us! Good Lord, deliver us!” And it seemed to him he himself was joining in the prayer, in a very agony: “Deliver us—deliver us! Good Lord, deliver us!” Almost he fancied he could hear the rain-drops beating against the window-panes—the old leaded panes in the ivy-covered church in far-away England. The cold, pleasant rain; and he longed to turn and look, but his mother’s gentle hand kept her wilful boy still. But was it his mother? Surely his mother would never have been so cruel—it was Chung Lee—Chung Lee, who held him fast. And—he rubbed his eyes—he was dreaming—dreaming there was no church, no rain-drops, no solemn Litany; only the hot, lonely bush, and he must be going mad. He took out his little pocket-book and wrote in it, “I am going mad;” and then a pitiful thought for those who might read it and grieve over it made him tear out the page.

He tried to keep steadily on, to make diagonal stretches as he had done at first; but it was hard work. It seemed to him only by chance he found the blazed tree again, and to-day he lost it altogether.

The shadows lengthened again, and again the cockatoos flew screaming overhead to the distant water-hole so far beyond his reach. But he only followed them longingly with his bloodshot eyes. He knew now that never in this life should he quench his thirst again. Only it was so hard, so cruelly hard—if he could only die—die now—if Death—that great deliverer—would free him from his pain. He was almost past walking now, but still he made an effort, sometimes falling, but always, however terrible the struggle, crawling on again. And so the night passed slowly—slowly—and another day dawned, and he knew as he watched the sun rise blood-red above the tree tops that he could go no further, that the end must come soon.

The thought came that perhaps the searchers who would come some day would pass this place by—and with infinite pains he dragged himself to his feet, and leaning against a tree trunk, took out his knife, and tried to cut STOP on the hard bark. But sight and

sense were failing fast. The landscape swam one great blur the colour of blood before his eyes, the knife slipped from his fingers, and he sank to his knees. "Oh, my God, my God, pity me." Again he took out the little pocket-book and scrawled across the page—he could not see—"God bless my darling," then with it still clasped in his hand, fell forward on his face.

Who shall tell the rest? Who shall say when the Mighty Death-Angel touched his eyes with tender merciful fingers and brought him peace and rest?

Three days later they found him not two hundred yards from the track he had sought so long, and with kindly hands laid him in his grave beneath the big oak tree where his failing hands had tried to carve a prayer that they would stop. It is an old story now in Mungadingadell; only sometimes over the camp-fire they tell how Will Hammond was lost in the Waroona Scrub, in the year when the two imported rams died. Even to his favourite sister he is but a tender, pitiful memory, and only Dr. Anderson's little daughter, crying her heart out over that soiled pocket-book, knows she can never, never forget the young fellow who brought bliss into her life for a few brief days, and then went out of it for ever.



APPARITION.

(From Victor Hugo.)

I SAW an angel float above my head;

His flight the tempest stilled, and calmed the sea.

"What seekest thou, O angel fair?" I said,

"In this sad midnight hour?"

He answered me:

"I come to take thy soul."

"Where?—tell me where.

Into what dwelling, heavenly messenger?"

But he was silent.

"Art thou Death?" I cried—

"Or art thou Life?"

"Nor Life nor Death," he sighed.

"They call me *Love*."

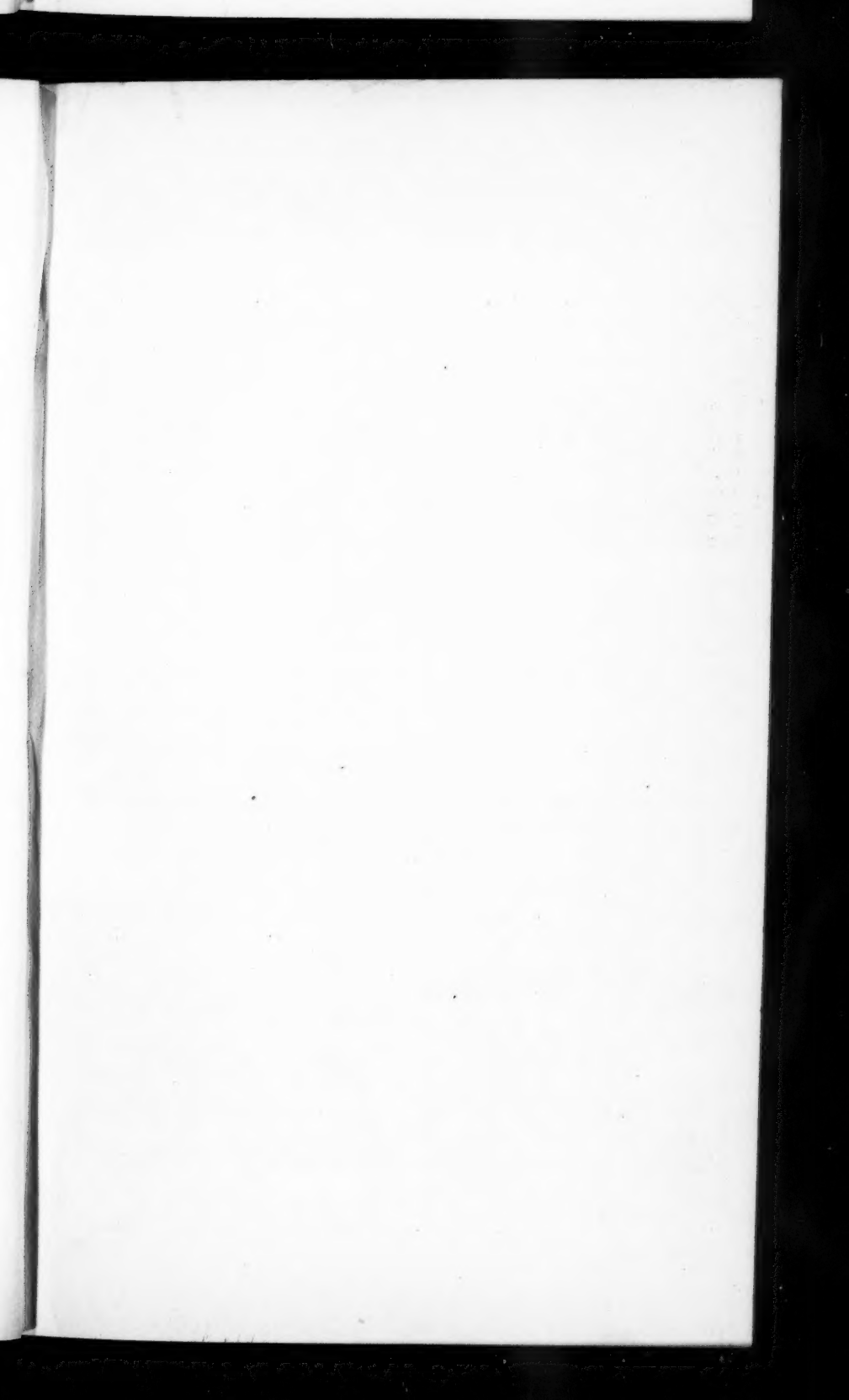
Then on his brow there fell

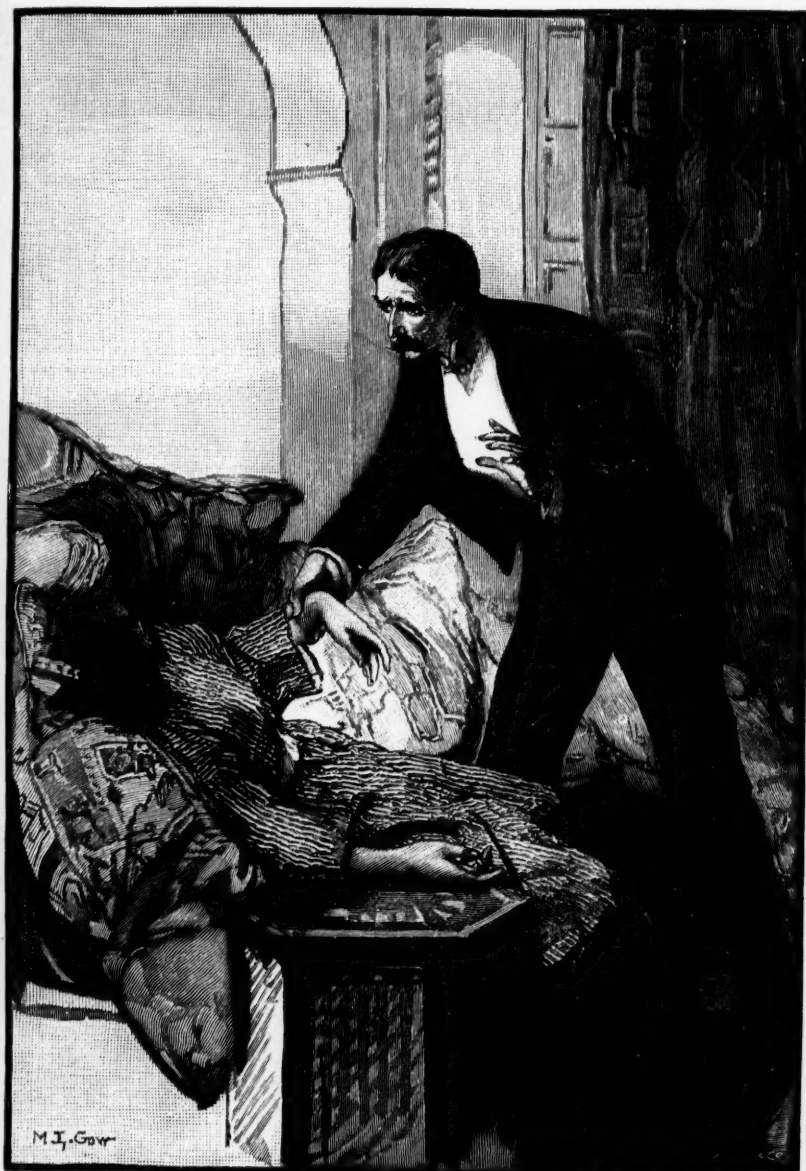
A light that was more glorious than the spring—

And in the depths of gloom inscrutable

Stars trembled through the feathers of his wing.

C. E. MEETKERKE.





M. L. GOW.

R. TAYLOR.

HE STAGGERED FORWARD WITH A GROAN, AND LIFTED THE COLD HAND
THAT WOULD NEVER GRASP HIS AGAIN.